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SCIENTIFICATION
AT ITS BEST

STARTLING STORIES

MAR. 1942

A NOVEL OF THE FUTURE COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

STARTLING STORIES

MAR.

15¢

A THRILLING
PUBLICATION

HORNETS OF SPACE

A Hall of Fame Story
By R. F. STARZL

FEATURING TARNISHED UTOPIA

An Amazing Novel
of the Future

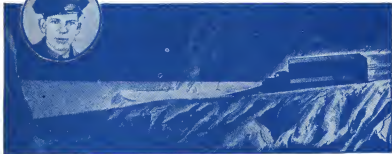
By MALCOLM JAMESON



"I RODE A JUGGERNAUT DOWN A CHUTE-THE-CHUTE!"



A true experience of L. S. VANDIVER, Laramie, Wyoming



"A WINDING RIBBON of glassy ice faced me as I nosed my big Diesel truck down Telephone Canyon, near Laramie, Wyoming, one dark winter night," writes Mr. Vandiver. "Behind me, on a twenty-eight foot trailer, rode 27,000 pounds of freight."

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"I WAS SKIDDING TOWARDS ETERNITY when I remembered my flashlight. Its bright beam flooded the road ahead. Thanks to 'Eveready' *fresh* DATED batteries, I drove the six miles safely, saving not only my life, but the \$12,000 truck and its 13½ ton cargo."

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Dept. 6358, Drexel at 58th, Chicago

★ THE BEST IN SCIENTIFICTION ★

STARTLING STORIES

Vol. 7, No. 2

CONTENTS

March, 1942

A Complete Book-Length Scientifiction Novel

TARNISHED UTOPIA

By

MALCOLM JAMESON



Racked with Pain in the Torture Chambers of the Moon, a Brave American Plots a Terrible Death for Prince Lohan, Dictator of the Solar System!..... 14

Other Unusual Stories

- SILENT EDEN Henry Kuttner 88
A Superhuman Being Shackles Two Mortals in a Private World
HORNETS OF SPACE R. F. Starzl 100
An Outstanding Classic from Scientifiction's Hall of Fame
MISTER JOHN DOE, EARTHMAN Joseph J. Millard 108
A Cosmic Cloud Threatens to Destroy the Sun

Special Features

- THE ETHER VIBRATES Announcements and Letters 10
THRILLS IN SCIENCE Oscar J. Friend 83
SCIENCE QUESTION BOX Answers to Queries 99
REVIEW OF FAN PUBLICATIONS Sergeant Saturn 125
Cover Painting by Earle K. Bergey—Illustrating TARNISHED UTOPIA

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If you're looking for a quick way to better pay, and a chance to get a good, permanent job in a field of real opportunity, here's the formula that has worked for the men you see above, and hundreds of others, too. It's not a "miracle cure" nor a "long-chance" operation. It is a time-tested, practical way to make \$5 to \$10 a week extra a few months from now, and to prepare for a full-time job paying up to \$50 a week as a Radio Technician or Radio Operator.

Beginners Train at Home to Make \$30, \$40, \$50 a Week

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Name Have You Instrument?

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City State

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—and how *YOU* can take advantage of it

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Then our governmental policy forces the keeping of better and more complete records in every office and plant. It is not a matter of choice with any firm—it is necessity.

For instance Federal Securities Act, with its insistence upon publicity of complete facts about every company selling its securities publicly, compels more frequent and more accurate financial state-

ments—and these in turn call for more and better accounting.

Then the Social Security tax, the unemployment regulations, the Wages and Hours Act, the Excess Profits tax and other taxes necessitated by national defense—all center around more complete accounting records.

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... Instead of SHAME!

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Skinny?
Weak?
Flabby?

Will You Let Me
Prove I Can Make You
a New Man?

I KNOW what it means to have the kind of body that people pity! Of course, you wouldn't know it to look at me now, but I was once a skinny weakling who weighed only 97 lbs! I was ashamed to strip for sports or undress for a swim. I was such a poor specimen of physical development that I was constantly self-conscious and embarrassed. And I felt only HALF-ALIVE.

But later I discovered the secret that turned me into "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man." And now I'd like to prove to you that the same system can make a NEW MAN of YOU!

What Dynamic Tension Will Do For You

I don't care how old or young you are or how ashamed of your present physical condition you may be. If you can simply raise your arm and flex it I can add SOLID MUSCLE to your biceps—yes, on each arm—in double-quick time! Only 15 minutes a day—right in your own home—is all the time I ask of you! And there's no cost if I fail.

I can broaden your shoulders, strengthen your back, develop your whole muscular system INSIDE and OUTSIDE! I can add inches to your chest, give you a vice-like grip, make those legs of yours lithe and powerful. I can shoot new strength into your old backbone, exercise those inner organs, help you cram your body so full of pep, vigor and red-blooded vitality that you won't feel there's even "standing room" left for weakness and that lazy feeling! Before I get through with you I'll have your whole frame "measured" to a nice new, beautiful suit of muscle!

Only 15 Minutes A Day

No "ifs," "ands" or "maybes." Just tell me where you want handsome, powerful muscles. Are you fat and flabby? Or skinny and gawky? Are you short-winded, peevish? Do you hold back and let others walk off with the prettiest girls, best jobs, etc.? Then write for details

about "Dynamic Tension" and learn how I can make you a healthy, confident, powerful HE-MAN.

"Dynamic Tension" is an entirely NATURAL method. Only 15 minutes of your spare time daily is enough to show amazing results—and it's actually fun. "Dynamic Tension" does the work.

"Dynamic Tension" That's the ticket! The identical natural method that I myself developed to change my body from the scrawny, skinny-chested weakling I was at 17 to my present super-man physique! Thousands of other fellows are becoming marvellous physical specimens—my way. Give you no gadgets or contraptions to fool with. When you have learned to develop your strength through "Dynamic Tension," you can laugh at artificial muscle-makers. You simply utilize the DORMANT muscle-power in your own body—watch it increase and multiply into real, solid LIVE MUSCLE.

My method—"Dynamic Tension"—will turn the trick for you. No theory—every exercise is practical. And, man, so easy! Spend only 15 minutes a day in your own home. From the very start you'll be using my method of "Dynamic Tension" almost unconsciously every minute of the day—walking, bending over, etc.—to BUILD MUSCLE AND VITALITY.

Charles
Atlas

Holder of title,
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Developed Man."
As he looks to-
day, from actual
untouched snap-
shot.

Mail Coupon
For My
FREE Book

CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 77B,
115 East 23rd Street, New York, N. Y.

I want the proof that your system of "Dynamic Tension" will help make a New Man of me—give me a healthy, brawny body and big muscle development. Send me your free book, "Everlasting Health and Strength."

Name
(Please print or write plainly)

Address

City State



FREE BOOK "Everlasting Health and Strength"

In it I talk to you in straight-from-the-shoulder language. Packed with inspirational pictures of myself and pupils—fellows who became NEW MEN in strength, my way. Let me show you what I helped THEM do. See what I can do for YOU! For a real thrill, send for this book today. AT ONCE. CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 77-B, 115 East 23rd Street, New York, N. Y.



A VAST there, my space hounds—a ray-proof vast, if you don't mind. And you'd better push the controller switch on your gravity belts up another notch, too, to sort of hold you steady in the ship as we take this next elliptic at full acceleration.

Old as the eternal hills is the expression, "blood on the moon." And grimly significant, too. But that proved too small a canvas for Author Hal K. Wells to paint on. A simple satellite wasn't big enough. So Wells went to headquarters for area on his novel for his novel for next issue. **BLOOD ON THE SUN** is about the hottest rocket blast the old Sarge has hurled at you spacesters in many a moon, full or sober.

Hot is the right word, by the way, but don't misinterpret or you'll be off your stellar course a full ninety degrees. Which is quite something in space latitude.

The action of this story does not take place on old Sol where the temperature fluctuates somewhere between 6000 and 20,000 degrees of B.t.u.'s. It transpires on and between two or three planets. But it's hot in action and in news value. And there is where the Torchy Blane of space and her greatest rival, the ace reporter of the same Earth newspaper, fight like a pair of Mercurian samblivoks in a merry game of check and double-check, cross and double-cross, as they scramble for the news.

THE BRAIN DESTROYERS

Trouble begins when the incredibly ancient Brain Destroyers arouse from their sleep and decide it is time to take over the bodies of mankind for their own alien purposes. But nobody believes in such fantastic skulduggery save the red-headed gal who is the feature columnist of the said newspaper. And right there trouble really starts.

Before the old Sarge spoils the yarn by telling you too much we'll just stop off here by cutting the fuel jets. You space birds take it up from here and shiver in your own sweat and go crazy while the reporter and the columnist fight the Brain Destroyers, the hard-headed governments of the Solar System—and each other in a glorious free-for-all which presents a picture like a close-up of an explosion in a Chinese fireworks factory.

BLOOD ON THE SUN will remain with you long after you have forgotten whether there was a BEM on the cover or not.

HALL OF FAME CLASSIC

As a special tidbit of science fiction, next issue will contain a gem of a Hall of Fame yarn by Stanton A. Coblenz, which you

senior kiwis will remember with a thrill of pleasure. **THE MAKING OF MISTY ISLE** is a scientific yarn worthy of Verne or Wells—H. G., this time.

And, by the bye, the old Sarge is still waiting for a big vote and a sterling letter of nomination from all of you space birds for a Hall of Fame Classic. Just don't select such long stories as some you kiwis have done. The long stories worthy of this honor are printed serially in **CAPTAIN FUTURE**. Only short gems—from eight thousand words, down—can be considered for **STARTLING STORIES**.

ETHERGRAMS

So much for announcemens. Comes now the old Sarge's chore of the month—a first-class brawl with you space harpies, and then a little swamping work to clean up the mess and get the craft in shipshape order again.

Before we pounce on the mail pouch and open the communication key let me comment on the address of Robert Q. Heinlein to the Denver convention of science fiction fans. Surprising as it may seem to those who did not hear him, Mr. Heinlein did not clutter his speech with a lot of mystic numbo-jumbo about science fiction writing and the weird flora and fauna of far-flung planets.

Instead, he gave one of the most sane addresses on science fiction, on science future, and on the deplorable widespread conditions of the world today that it has been the old space dog's pleasure to read in half a dozen Solar eclipses. If you kiwis want to read this speech for yourselves, you can procure a copy for ten cents from the Novacious Publications, Box 6475, Metropolitan Station, Los Angeles, Calif.

All right, clamp on your headphones and tune in. Here comes a kiwi who has an

(Continued on page 12)



H.C. Lewis

TRAIN THIS QUICK EASIER WAY FOR ELECTRICITY 12 Weeks **Practical WORK IN MY CHICAGO SHOPS**



FIRST—You are told and shown how to do it.



THEN—You do the job yourself.



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"Learn By Doing."



"I sure was satisfied with Coyne... I got work right after I graduated and I feel that Coyne has brought me success in increasing my earnings."
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Canada



"... Coyne has first class instruction to teach you the simplest things to start with and they have the equipment to show you these things as you advance..."
Ben Rickman, S. Car.

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THE ETHER VIBRATES

(Continued from page 10)

aversion to the seventh color of the spectrum—and does he see red!

PRIMITIVE COLOR

By Paul Carter

O.K. so I'm space-mad. But Rudy Belarski is STILL inaccurate! Why, those things he's done recently don't fit their stories (with the single, far-fetched Williamson exception) enough to be accepted by the cross-eyed Alpha Centaurian editors. Take this ish for example: Wellman's "Petal Fuss" Martians do NOT look like the things depicted on the cover. In fact, nobody seems to be able to get a decent likeness of those critters. (The only guy that ever got 'em remotely similar to Wellman's conception that I can remember was Schneeman, in '39.

And, for your information, Brother Belarski, our hero was NOT fighting the Martians, only the Earth exploiters. All right, all right, I suppose it's some obscure reference to his ancestors in the First Martio-Terrestrial War, but I still don't like that kind of illustrating.

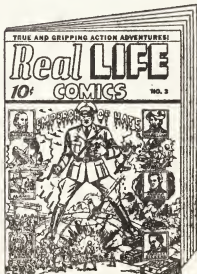
Wellman's heroes do NOT use machine guns as the one on the port side of the ship seems to be doing, MS rays, electro-guns, roving bombs, even nitroglycerin in this yarn—but, definitely, NOT machine-guns!

Hard-headed ghostliness graduates from the girl's dress to the ship's hull. I still don't like it. The only way for these societies to be effective, Sarge, is to create one that will take 'em all in. How about SF7POCOSFP—Society For The Prevention Of Covers On Science Fiction Publications (period).

Seriously, though, I believe you can use all the B.E.M.s you want. They at least distinguish S.F. from the other mags—if they're sufficiently unearthly. Which means that this (illiterate and space-mad) reader would like more Wesso on the cover—which means an automatic request for Paul.

Wesso's character sketches and his full-

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and Teachers!



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page pic on page twenty-one are his best and the issue's best, this time. But how come Wellman's yarn rates only 4 pica? Wait—put the pic on p. 94 up with the other two. Morey was—well, let's say sketchy. Come on, Leo, you can do better than that. We've seen you.

Another facet of Wellman's "Chunk of Future" is developed. Put a big, beautiful mark up for Wellman. Here's an interesting point you might develop: Stuart ("Solarr" Rapidan, as you claimed in "Solarr of Titan," reached the Saturnian system some time in the 2900s; John Braman of "Worlds of Tomorrow" was going out to colonize there in 2980. Intelligent natives . . . formerly ruthless Earthman . . . maybe crooks from the Kaiser expedition . . . a few Truangs . . . stir well, and??? How about it, Sarge? Why not pass this on to Mr. Wellman? No?

"Christmas on Ganymede," by Isaac Asimov, was one of the funniest cargoes ever dumped in the hold of the Jelly S. S., as you once called our mag. Gallun, as usual, is adequate. Dr. Miles J. Breuer's tale is better than Dr. Keller's of last issue, and fairly close to "Death From The Stars"; not, however, to "Man-Beast of Torree" or "City of Singing Flame," which were two of the best Hall of Fame selections you've made yet.

By the way . . . you've been promising something by John Taine for a long time, Sarge. Now why not hurry up and let us have it? We have our rights, you know. Or do we?—166 S. University St., Blackfoot, Idaho.

As chief astrogator of this ship, and in the old tradition of sailing masters, I can't concede you space monkeys any rights to run wild during a spatial voyage. So, get back into your cage, Pee-lot Carter, and study your third dimensional arc with Polaris in transit. Just because you visualize Wellman's Martian heebie-jeebies as animated chrysanthemums on a nematode

(Continued on page 118)

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Tarnished Utopia

By MALCOLM JAMESON

Author of "Time Column," "Prospectors of Space," etc.

CHAPTER I

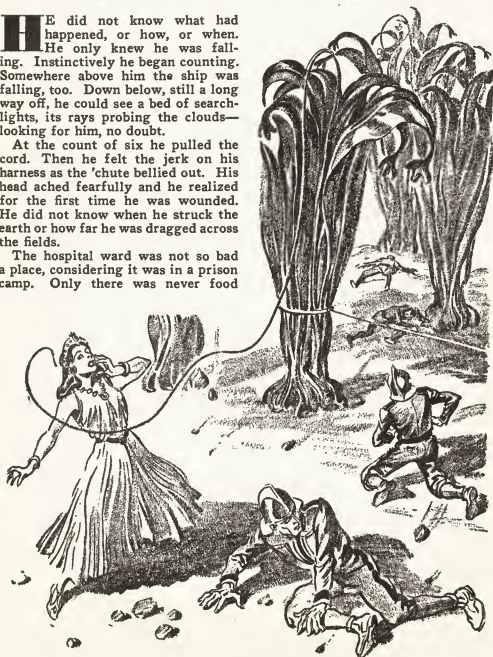
The Road to Tomorrow

HE did not know what had happened, or how, or when. He only knew he was falling. Instinctively he began counting. Somewhere above him the ship was falling, too. Down below, still a long way off, he could see a bed of searchlights, its rays probing the clouds—looking for him, no doubt.

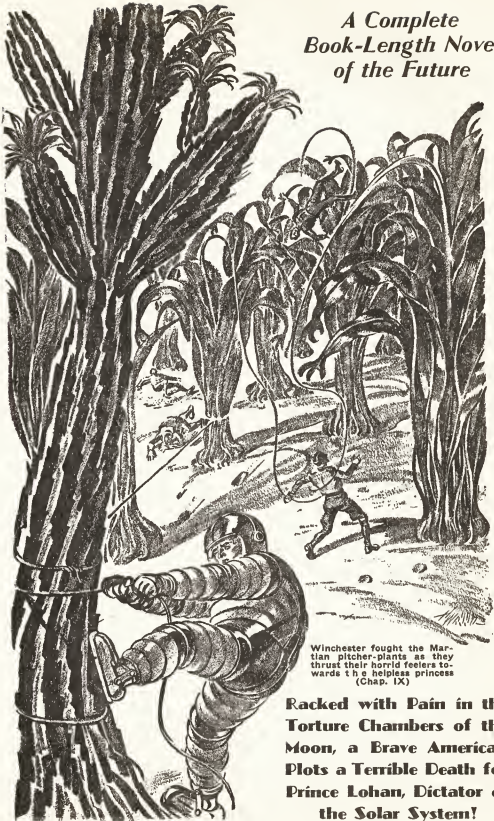
At the count of six he pulled the cord. Then he felt the jerk on his harness as the 'chute belled out. His head ached fearfully and he realized for the first time he was wounded. He did not know when he struck the earth or how far he was dragged across the fields.

The hospital ward was not so bad a place, considering it was in a prison camp. Only there was never food

enough. It was later, though, that he felt the pinch of real hunger. That was after he had been pronounced fit



*A Complete
Book-Length Novel
of the Future*



Winchester fought the Mar-
tian pitcher-plants as they
thrust their horrid feelers to-
wards the helpless princess
(Chap. IX)

**Racked with Pain in the
Torture Chambers of the
Moon, a Brave American
Plots a Terrible Death for
Prince Lohan, Dictator of
the Solar System!**

for duty and sent out daily with the other war prisoners, to repair the holes made nightly by Britain's bombers along the main railway line.

"Serves me right, I guess," Allan Winchester muttered to himself as he shouldered his pick and shovel and stumbled along after the rest. "I had no business mixing in another fellow's war."

But the guttural curse of a burly guard and the threat of the ever-ready gunbutt made him change his mind. He ducked the blow and hastened his stride, but red rage surged within him.

"No," he added, in an inaudible growl, "it is my war! It is everybody's war who hates cruelty and oppression. I'll see it through. Ruthless tyrants shall not rule the earth!"

For a moment Winchester's thoughts had gone back to the good job and cozy home he had given up in the States to fight these dictators. He had been a consulting engineer. Moreover, his bachelor bungalow in the suburbs had been the gathering place for others like him who shared his devoted hobby.

In Winchester's rare garden a few amateur enthusiasts carried on the work begun by Burbank—the creation of new and interesting plant hybrids. All that the American engineer had surrendered in a glow of indignation over the treatment of the helpless little countries of Europe. One day he had flown to Canada and joined her air force.

"And here I am," he muttered again, ruefully, "shot down in my very first big show."

"Ssh-h-h, Yank!" came a cautious hiss from the man next to him. They had been detailed to fill in a new-made bomb crater. The guard had gone on forty yards beyond.

"D'ya want to join the gang?" whispered his mate. "We've tunneled under the barbed-wire fence. Tonight's the night. Ten are going, but they say there's a hiding place outside for one or two more. Friends, you know. Working undercover."

"Count me in," answered Winchester in a low voice. He sank his pick into the soft shoulder of the crater.

The guard had wheeled and was looking their way.

"I'll tell you more at mess-time," said the other man softly, as he flung a shovelful of damp earth down the slope.

ALLAN WINCHESTER, the American, was the last man through the hole. Wriggling along like an earthworm, he thought the tunnel interminable, especially since the passage of the others had caused several small cave-ins, which had to be dug out with the hands and pushed backward with the feet. By the time he emerged into the dark night outside the barricades, the others had gone. Winchester brushed the loose dirt from him and groped his way forward. They had told him what to do if they became separated.

It was then that the hoarse-voiced whistle on the prisoners' steam-laundry building broke the night air with its raucous blast. A flare burst overhead and floodlights came on. Rifle shots rang out. Off to the left a machine gun began to chatter. Winchester heard men shouting in the fields ahead of him, and the sudden scream of a stricken man. He dropped panting into a little ditch and crawled into some shrubbery.

For hours he lay there in a cold sweat. Heavily booted men crashed through the brush repeatedly, proding with bayonets.

"Zehn," one said. "Ten we got, already. The *Kommandant* says there should be one more."

Dawn came, but they did not find the American. He stayed there all day without moving, though his thirst became painful. For far and near sounds told him the search was still on. Somehow the news must have leaked out. The prison break had turned into failure. What was to have been escape ended in a death trap.

Winchester lay still another night and day, except for chewing some lush grass for the moisture that was in it. Then on the third night he stole forth and crossed the pasture beyond. It was at Munich, those

prisoners from Dunquerque had told him, that he would find friends and shelter—if he could only get to it. The address he had long since memorized.

It took Winchester four nights, walking always in the fields and skirting villages and highways. He drank occasionally from brooks and once succeeded in stealing a hatful of vegetables from a farm garden. But in time he reached the outskirts of Munich and knew that for once he was in luck. A vigorous British air raid was going on.

He made his way to the heart of the town unchallenged. Troopers and firemen were everywhere, but they had their hands full snatching at dazzling fire-bombs or dodging crashing masonry. Winchester hurried on, searching for the little alley three blocks west of the Schutzenplatz. He had little trouble finding his way, despite the pandemonium of flame and destruction going on about him, for Munich was a city fairly familiar to him. He had lived there for months when he was a student before the war.

It was during a lull in the aerial attack that Winchester reached the neighborhood. The street was perfectly dark, except for the dull red glare of reflected fires. The blackness in the alley was as pitch. The American stole into it, feeling with a cautious toe for stumbling-blocks among the rough cobbles.

He had hardly gone four steps when he froze motionless against a wall. Overhead a brilliant magnesium flare suddenly blazed, lighting the place up like noon. Winchester waited, tense, while it burned out and slowly drifted away. Then, as the dark returned, he took a step forward.

"No!" A soft hand clutched his sleeve. "This way. Say nothing, but—oh, please—hurry!"

THE voice was low and vibrant, the voice of a woman. Winchester could barely make out her outline in the darkness, but he judged her to be young. Her hand found his and tugged. He followed her



WINCHESTER

blindly. She had spoken to him in English!

She must be one of the friends his fellow prisoners had told him of. But to his surprise, instead of taking him deeper into the alley, she darted out into the broad street from which he had just come.

"Where to?" he asked huskily.

"Anywhere," she answered in an agonized voice. "Anywhere but *there!* I have just learned we were betrayed. Two of our members are Gestapo men and they are waiting there for us now. Come!"

They ran blindly in the dark, down one street and up another. Bombs were bursting steadily to the westward, and the barking of the ack-acks was almost continuous. A sudden flare lit the street up once more. Dead ahead of them were two gendarmes. One raised his arm and shouted a challenge, then charged forward. The girl jerked Winchester into a doorway.

"Try this door," she moaned. Her voice was urgent.

The door was locked, but Winchester drew back a yard and launched himself bodily against it. There was a rending of splintering wood and the portal crashed open, hurling the American twice his length into a dark hall. He picked himself up dazedly,

only to find the girl was once more at his side. Heavy footfalls were heard running by the door. The police paused, hesitated and turned back.

"Here is a stairway going down," the girl whispered in the dark.

They tumbled down it. It was a spiral staircase and of stone. They had reached the first stage below when they heard the upper door burst open and the yells of their pursuers. Almost in the same instant there was a deafening crash and a blinding flash of light. They were flung into a far corner, and cowered there while they heard the building above them come crashing down. A bomb from the sky had miraculously covered their retreat.

Winchester lay quietly, holding the trembling form of his rescuer in his arms, until the last of the reverberations died away and until the dust which filled the air settled a little. If the policemen above had died, they had died instantly, for they made no sound. At length, assured of comparative safety, Winchester moved the girl a little way and fished out his box of treasured matches. He struck one.

They were in what appeared to be a medieval vault, of heavy stone construction. The stairs down which they had come were choked with fallen debris from above. There was the smell of smoke in the air. Beyond the circle of the flickering light the stairs curved on down into blackness.

"We had better go lower," Winchester said, lifting the girl. "The sub-cellar is the best place until this raid is over."

He did not say so, but what he feared now was fire. It was obvious they had escaped one fate only to be trapped to await another.

Before a huge nail-studded oaken door the stairs ended. The American lifted the heavy wrought-iron latch and swung it open. Inside were rows of glistening white tables, and in brackets on the walls Winchester was delighted to see wax candles. He lit one and closed the door behind.

"How incongruous!" the girl murmured, looking about. She still trembled a little, but her air was as unafraid as though she were at a party. "Look, a modern diet kitchen located in this gruesome old dungeon."

"The guy that did it knew a good air-raid shelter when he saw one," explained Winchester, casting an appraising eye over the groined stone arches overhead. "They can blast the whole town down and we'll still be all right."

BUT something more than the security of the chamber had taken his eye. At one end of the room was an immense electric refrigerator. The girl already had its door open, looking over its contents. People in blockaded countries soon learn to scout for food at every opportunity. Winchester himself was famished.

Now that there was light, he could see the pinch of hunger in the girl's pale face. He wondered how beautiful she would really be, with color in her cheeks and the sunken spots rounded out once more. For despite his preoccupation with food and safety, the American could not miss observing that she was the kind of girl a man meets but once in a lifetime.

"Smells all right—smells good," she pronounced, dragging out a glass bowl filled with an amber-colored gelatine. She poked a finger into the quivering stuff and tasted it. "It is good!"

They both laughed. The girl set the bowl on the shelf while she crossed the vault to the tables on the other side, where plates and cutlery were stacked. Meanwhile Winchester studied the room, trying to figure out what the layout meant.

One side was lined with shelves on which stood rows of jars containing vari-colored pellets. The label on one read: "Vitamin B Concentrate." The contents of the others were similar, though Winchester had never dreamed before there could be so many vitamins. "L₁ & P₁, P₂ Complex" said the ticket on another jar. Another table had standard foods,

such as dried beans, sugar and other staples.

"Everything but meat," commented Winchester, thinking how nice it would be to sink his teeth into a juicy porterhouse once more.

"There's meat, too," the girl told him, handing him a plate of the clear amber jelly, "but I imagine this is better for you on an empty stomach. You poor fellow, you must be nearly starved."

"You don't look overfed yourself," Winchester smiled back.

Then he looked at the cupboard she had indicated when she said there was meat. She had thrown the doors open to reveal a row of small cages containing cats, dogs and rabbits—all sound asleep.

To Winchester's notion, only the rabbits were legitimate meat. He wondered, though, why they slept so soundly. The crash overhead should have wakened anything but the dead. Yet he could see their ribs rise and fall slowly as they breathed. Perhaps they had been doped for some dietetic experiment.

"Another helping?" the girl asked, reaching for the American's empty plate. Unconsciously they had eaten ravenously.

"Yeah," he yawned, lazily stretching his arms, "think I will."

She brought more food. Drowsily they ate it. Neither one knew when the candle burned out.

CHAPTER II

The Long Dawn

WINCHESTER opened his eyes to the darkness and raised his hand to his face. To his absolute and utter astonishment, he found it entangled in a heavy growth of hair! His hand trembled as he verified a discovery that bordered on the incredible. He was bearded like a patriarch, and the hair of his head overflowed his shoulders.

He sat up gasping, struck a match



PRINCESS CHEN CHIN

and staggered to his feet. The candle of last night was no more than a blackened stump of wick. He lit another and another. The light brought fresh astonishment.

The room looked incredibly old and moldy, and stalactites the American had not noticed the night before hung dripping from the arched stones above. The stones, he observed now, were covered with heavy green moss and ferns. And, to pile surprise on surprise, so was the floor!

Winchester rubbed his forehead dazedly. He glanced at the cages of animals. Where sleek, well-fed sleeping cats and dogs had been, there were now only skeletons, or emaciated, half-mummified carcasses. Mushrooms grew on one of the tables beside the ranks of stoppered glass jars. This cavern had the look of immeasurable antiquity, and the air had the smell of cave-trapped gases that had never known the warming rays of the sun.

The American knelt beside the girl. She sprawled where she had fallen, and under her outflung arm lay the empty plate from which she had been eating the gelatine of the night before. She was alive. There was no doubt about that, but her garments had that flimsy, rotten look of wrap-

pings from an Egyptian ancient tomb.

Nor was that all.

The oak door that gave onto the staircase was gone, except for a few soggy boards that still clung to the ancient wrought-iron hardware. Hard-packed rubble blocked the stairs. Small wonder their place of hiding had begun to look like a tomb—their burial was complete!

Only a narrow flue brought down fresh air. Winchester could make out a glimmer of green-tinged light at the top of it, as if filtered through leaves, but the flue was too small to admit his body.

He went back into the room and prowled among the food containers. He started to make breakfast on the gelatinous stuff. But as he was about to taste it, he noticed for the first time a withered and yellowing ticket clipped to the edge of the bowl.

Winchester took the card to the nearest light and read the dim scribble. "Lot 3133, ledger page 104." He turned the card over. On the back of it was the single word "*Nein*!" and a crude skull-and-crossbones. The American frowned. That was what they had eaten!

He pocketed the card and hunted for the ledger. He handled the gossamer pages gently, for fear they would fall apart under his fingers. To his delight the notes had been kept in English. On Page 104 he came upon this:

Eureka! 'The perfect food concentrate at last! But, alas, it is too perfect. A single grain will furnish subsistence for a large cat or a medium-sized dog for many weeks, but unfortunately the animal devotes its whole efforts to digestion. It lies stupefied as if drugged until the food has been absorbed. I must think of some way to dilute it. I have calculated that half a pound of it will sustain an adult human for many centuries—perhaps five, perhaps more. What a food!

Winchester shuddered. He looked down at the sleeping girl and a fresh horror smote him. He himself was

awake now—whether after months or years or centuries, he could not tell. Had they eaten the same amount? Was their rate of metabolism similar? Might the girl not sleep on for years and years to come, or whatever term it was?

He threw himself down beside her and tried to bring her to. But though he chafed and shook and even slapped her, she only stirred lightly and smiled dreamily, like a child in its cradle. At length he desisted.

HE had better shave, he thought. The beard made him feel unclean. He found a pair of shears, an oft-whetted butcher knife and the scoured bottom of an aluminum pan. It was tedious and painful, but he accomplished the shave.

Digging his way up to air was a slower job. It took weeks, during which Winchester had to work mostly in the dark to conserve the few remaining candles. It was more than twenty days when finally he broke through the surface into a bright starlit night.

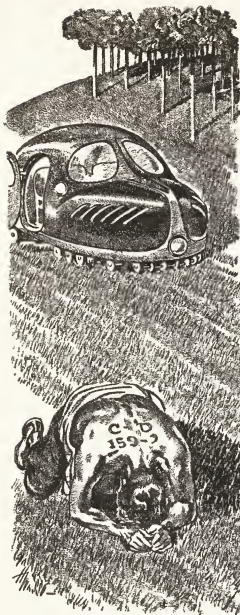
He hauled himself out onto the turf and drew his first breath of outside air. If the interior of the vault had been amazing, the world outside was no less so. Instead of emerging into an air-besieged German city, the American had emerged into virgin woods. It was a country of little hills, heavily grassed, and tall trees stood all about.

Winchester made a short tour of exploration close by, but saw no lights or sign of human habitation whatever. When he returned to the cavern, he sat for a long time looking at the sky.

Until the Moon rose, it looked much as it had always done. But when the Moon emerged from behind a towering oak-top, Winchester had to gasp in unstinted admiration. Whereas the Moon he had always known had been a pallid disk, featured only by craters in monochrome, this Moon was a thing of scintillating color.

It was as if it had been studded with jewels.

One crater gave off a many-faceted ruby light, another purest emerald



Winchester and Cynthia gazed in consternation at the groveling man (Chap. III)

green. Another was of the color of a prime sapphire, while over the whole surface of the globe were patches of a vague iridescence, such as is seen in fire-opals and choice moonstones. Winchester gazed and marveled at the beauty.

At length he tired, and decided to go below. Tomorrow he must get up early and explore the country about him.

It was clear that the war had de-

stroyed Munich and that it had ceased to exist as a city, but surely somewhere nearby the Germans had rebuilt its successor.

But by a happy coincidence, when Winchester went below the girl stirred slightly of her own accord and opened a lazy eye. He stood above her, holding the stump of their last candle.

She sat up, blinking.

"I think I must have fallen asleep," she said apologetically.

"I think you must have," he said. It had been three weeks since he himself had awakened.

All that time the girl had slept without moving.

"Did you rest well?" he asked.



"Oh, quite," she said, stifling a small yawn. "Do you think the raid is over?"

"Yes," Allan Winchester said, very soberly. "The raid is over."

For some reason he found it very hard to tell the girl what had happened.

Or rather, what he thought had happened. For he was not too sure that it was not all part of a not altogether unpleasant dream. Yet despite her merry peals of incredulous laughter, as if he was trying to amuse her, the aspects of the room and, above all the gaunt carcasses of the trapped animals at last convinced her.

"So we're years and years in the future—is that it?" she asked cheerfully. "Like Wells and the others used to write about?"

"Sort of," Winchester admitted. "Only what you've read is no help. It's all woods outside, and no people that I can see. Maybe the war washed the whole world up and we're all that's left."

"Another Adam and Eve, you mean?" she asked archly.

THE American blushed.

"W-well, no," he stammered. "That's not what I meant, exactly." He ruffled his hair and stared at the floor.

He felt a little out of his depth. He groped for an appropriate comeback, since she seemed to be in a light mood despite the momentous news he had given her.

"I do think, though," he managed, with a gulp, "that it is about time I knew your name. Since it is a decade or so—or maybe a century—that we've been living here in this cave."

"Nonsense!" the girl retorted. "Do you call this living? But since you want to know, my name is Cynthia Schnachelbauer. My father was German. German-American."

"Oh," Winchester said, repeating the name slowly. "Sounds rather cumbersome, the last half."

"Do you want to make something of it?" Cynthia challenged, planting her hands on her hips and jutting a small jaw at him.

"I may, at that," he said thoughtfully.

CHAPTER III

Prince Lohan

CYNTHIA made clothes for them. The ones they had were falling apart from rot. She worked from a roll of chamois skins she found in the kitchen-laboratory. In the meantime, Winchester gathered together a pack of selected provisions. When the two of them were quite ready for their expedition, they crawled up the steps to the outside vent and stepped into the woods above. After Winchester had sealed their cave with a flat stone, they started on their journey.

Of Munich there was nothing left, or hardly a trace. The frosts of unnumbered winters and the encroachment of vegetation had thrown apart what bits of masonry were left intact after the bombers had gone. Now it was virgin forest. But beyond, where once there had been fields, the adventurers came upon an endless lawn, on which tame deer grazed and peacocks strutted.

It was mid-afternoon before they encountered any evidence of the existence of man. Rounding the spur of a low hill, they came upon a valley where the grass had every appearance of just having been mowed. Winchester stooped to examine it, for his bewilderment had been growing at seeing so many thousand acres of carefully tended lawn. As he did, his eye caught a moving object.

The thing resembled a huge tortoise, and was racing down the valley at a great clip. It had a metallic, reddish sheen, as if plated with burnished copper. It approached rapidly, and as it came, Winchester noted that the color of the grass in its wake was not quite the same as that to its right. It was a mowing machine!

It halted abruptly some fifty feet away. A gaunt fellow, clad in a simple gray blouse and kilts of a coarse and cheap-looking material, popped out of a hatch that opened at its top. He leaped to the ground and at once prostrated himself, oriental style. In

the same movement, he snatched open the back of his blouse, revealing his naked shoulders and the upper half of his back.

Since the fellow persisted in remaining in the position into which he had thrown himself, kneeling and with his face buried in the grass, Winchester and Cynthia approached him slowly. As they neared, they saw that there were symbols and numbers branded or tattooed on his back.

Winchester stared at them with a frown. What troubled him was that the figures were placed so as to be read upside down! The creature was



identifying himself, and to do so he had to perform the kow-tow!

"Get up, man!" called Winchester sharply, seeing the fellow continued to grovel. "Tell us where is the nearest town."

"Ay, milord, whip me if you will, but do not mock me by calling me a 'man,'" whined the operator of the mowing machine. "I am but your miserable slave. They did not tell me you were abroad today, or I would not have been so bold—"

"Nonsense!" snorted Winchester, stooping and shaking the fellow by the shoulder. "Stand up and talk face to face."

He stepped back, astonished that what he supposed to be a German peasant should speak English so instinctively. Not that it was English exactly, but a peculiar Anglo-Saxon dialect.

The man stood up, and the visitors saw he was trembling. But the moment he looked into Winchester's face, his attitude changed with startling abruptness. He dropped his whining, abject servility. In its place he registered a curious blend of rage and fright. With a bound he sprang back into his machine, screaming at the same time.

"Away! Masterless slaves, away! I have not seen you—I have not spoken to you—I do not know you!" His utterances trailed off into a wail. "Ah, why did they have to come here? Now they will punish us all!"

HE SLAMMED the hatch cover down. The machine darted forward and in a moment was no more than a dwindling speck on the distant lawn.

"That's the payoff," said Winchester softly.

Cynthia looked at him, puzzled.

"Here's a plain laborer of Middle Europe, who speaks English as a matter of course, indicating that at some time in the past the English-speaking peoples dominated this country. Yet he has the psychology of a whipped slave."

"I still don't understand," Cynthia said.

"Because we were walking boldly across what I take to be forbidden grounds, our slave at once assumed that we were of the existing master class. So he behaved accordingly."

"They must be nice people," observed Cynthia sarcastically.

"Quite," Winchester agreed grimly.

"But when he stood up at my command and looked at us, he knew at once we were phonies. We are untamed slaves of his own race, not of his masters. They must be of another type altogether."

"I wonder what *has* happened to the world," Cynthia mused.

And this time, apprehension was in her voice.

Their education was soon to begin. Unnoticed while they had been talking with the slave, a dark object had been circling in the sky above. Now it swooped, to descend at a steep angle and in a tight spiral. It was a plane of sorts, painted brilliant scarlet, but it was noiseless and apparently propelled by some invisible internal force. It made a jarless landing a dozen yards away.

Two men sprang out. They were obviously police, for they wore trim blue uniforms glittering with gold lace and buttons. Queerly shaped weapons hung from hooks on their belts, and each wore a round leather loop dangling from shoulder to shoulder. Winchester took these to be aiguillettes of some description, but he was as instantly disabused.

As the men strode toward them, they unslipped the small ends of the tapered leather straps from one shoulder, and jerked the thick ends from sockets at the other. The straps were whips!

"Down, slaves!" one yelled harshly, swinging the whip above his head.

The other already had his unlimbered, and took a vicious slash at Cynthia. The singing tip missed her face by a scant inch.

"Take it easy, you!" snarled Winchester, lunging forward.

In his sudden white rage the American cared nothing for the mysterious gadgets dangling from these men's belts. His fist caught the second trooper squarely on the jaw and the fellow flopped backward, out cold.

But the crack of knuckles against jawbone was accompanied by a soft *spat!* While still unbalanced from the delivery of the blow, Winchester plunged forward onto the grass, frozen into his attitude of the moment. All his muscles and bones were filled with excruciating pain, yet he was so paralyzed by the unseen, swift force unleashed by the trooper that he could not make the slightest twitch.

He felt the lash of the whip a dozen times or more; heard Cynthia's screams. Then he fainted dead away under the accumulation of pain.

He could not have been out long, but when he resumed consciousness

he had normal possession of his muscles again—all except those of his arms, which dangled helplessly at his sides. He was sitting in the doorway of their captors' plane. The trooper who had knocked him out had revived his fellow officer, and the two of them were engaged in an examination of Cynthia.

"It's a good thing you didn't mark the girl," growled the leading trooper to his aide. "Prince Lohan would have busted you to a mine guard. As it is, there'll be a thousand merits to split between us for this job. She's the finest specimen I ever saw. Look! How pink and tender."

THE policeman pinched Cynthia's upper arm, and was rewarded with a prompt and resounding slap in the face. But he merely laughed and held her away from him with his long arms.

Winchester looked on with burning eyes. There was cold murder in his heart, but without the use of his arms he could not rise. He had a glimmering now, though, of what the ruling race was like. These troopers were big men and blond, yet with the flat faces and almond eyes of Mongols. Somehow they combined the salient features of both Scandinavians and Tibetans.

"But unbranded Nordics?" queried the man Winchester had hit. "There's a reward for them, too, isn't there?"

Winchester noticed now that both his and Cynthia's chamois garments had been torn away, to reveal their unmarried shoulder blades.

"Sure," said the first. "They used to turn up often in the old days, but I haven't heard of one being found in years. We're in luck."

Other red planes commenced raining down. Soon the field was covered with them, as policeman after policeman came up to inspect the find. Apparently the original discoverers had broadcast the news. But no one molested Cynthia or Winchester further. It was evident they were awaiting the arrival of some higherup.

He was not long in coming. A cigar-shaped vessel with stubby wings made its appearance in the skies. It



was banded like a hornet, with alternate rings of black and gold. It made a smooth landing as had the others, and in the very midst of them.

A tall handsome man of the same Mongol-Nordic hybrid type stepped out, accompanied by another. The first was dressed elegantly in yellow silk robes ornamented with a profusion of dark jewels. The other wore yellow silk, too, but it was striped with red.

"Prince Lohan!" shouted the senior police officer, and all present fell on their faces.

The kow-tow, evidently, was required of everyone. The exceptions in this case were Winchester, who could not, and Cynthia who would not. She stood glaring defiantly at the prince who had come to look at her.

"Ah," said he presently, after inspecting her as coolly as if she had been some rare and costly species of newfound animal. "Send her to the School of Arts and Graces. Have her brought before me again at the next annual Palace competition. Dispense with her examination. I would not have her marred. We will find out what we want from the man."

His gorgeously robed companion bowed deeply.

"As for him, take him to the near-

est magistrate—that will be in New Vienna. After the quiz, carry out the usual sentence for those striking one of my officers. Take care to keep him alive, though. I am curious to know where these masterless slaves come from."

Again the aide nodded. Then he made a suggestion on his own.

"And the usual roundup of your Excellency's own slaves to find out who has been harboring this pair?"

"Of course," snapped Prince Lohan.

He strode back to his ship and disappeared within. It rose at once and was out of sight in a few seconds. The motionless police kneeling on the ground rose at a signal given by the attendant whom Lohan had left behind. Winchester noticed now that not all of them were of the Mongoloid type. Many seemed normal Westerners of his own background. Perhaps not all of them were destined to be slaves.

The prince's adjutant hurled out orders. The police went into action. One drew a stumpy, conical instrument and leveled it at Cynthia. There was the faintest hint of a swift, rose-colored spark, and the girl wilted and fell unconscious. Two of the police picked her up and carried her to one of the ships.

Two others lifted Winchester and flung him into a seat, where they fastened him with a strap to keep him from falling out. In another moment the entire flotilla took the air.

CHAPTER IV

Moonward Bound

NEW VIENNA was but a village. Winchester could see it plainly as the flying machine slid down from the heights. There was a cluster of a score or more small houses nestling beside the Danube, and in their midst was one large masonry building. Before it was an empty square, and behind it another on which a few of the planes were already alighting.

Winchester's captors unloosed the paralysis that held him sufficiently for him to clamber out of the plane and walk with them from the parking lot to the front entrance of the edifice. As he rounded a corner his eye lit on the polished granite cornerstone.

The inscription read:

DEDICATED 3012 A.D.

He and Cynthia had slept a thousand years! And more, for the building was anything but new.

He was given no opportunity to speculate further as to the exact year they had awakened in. He was already up the steps and passing through the grim portals into the audience chamber of the magistrate. His examination was about to begin.

With swift efficiency the police stripped him of his chamois garment. Then, naked as he was, they strapped him into a high-backed straight chair. One trooper plunged a needle into his arm, another fastened a small aromatic capsule to his upper lip and secured it there with a sort of glue. The Mongoloid magistrate looked on with a savage scowl.

A surge of warmth pervaded Winchester's body. He felt a sudden inexplicable yearning to tell these people everything he knew. They had only to ask. But as if to make assurance doubly certain, another trooper stepped up and touched his neck with a slender silver instrument.

At once the courtroom seemed to burst into a million blobs of fiery light. An unbearable agony racked Winchester's whole being. Despite his efforts to suppress it, he screamed wildly, wishing only for sudden death.

The policeman withdrew the glittering point and the pain ceased as suddenly as it had begun. He stepped around before his prisoner and scrutinized his eyeballs. Then he turned to the magistrate.

"Ready, Excellency. The anti-inhibition serum has taken hold, and he absorbs the sensory stimulant well. His magnification of pain is enormous, and he can stand any amount of it without fainting. Will your

Excellency please to proceed?"

"Where was your last hiding place, slave," asked the judge harshly, "and how long were you in it?"

"A cellar under the ruins of Munich," answered Winchester in a dull monotone, "since the year Nineteen forty-one."

"Rebellious fool and liar," snarled the judge. "How dare you address the court with such flippancy? There is no such place as Munich. It is now eighteen hundred and seventy-nine years since the birth of our glorious hero-conqueror—the Great Khan Ghengiz, our god and founder!"

At a motion from the magistrate the policeman gestured with his silver instrument. He touched it lightly to Winchester's left shoulder, then drew a line straight down to the wrist. The sensation was exactly that of having a red-hot knife plunged into the deltoid muscle and then drawn along the bones, splitting the arm downward. Yet the point left no mark, and the excruciating pain vanished as soon as it was withdrawn.

Winchester tried desperately to concentrate on mental arithmetic. He remembered vaguely that Genghis Khan had flourished about the year 1200. That and eighteen hundred seventy-nine brought the total to somewhere above three thousand. It confirmed the date he had seen on the cornerstone. His sleep *had* been for more than a thousand years!

BUT his mind could not blank out the agony of the fiendish torture now being inflicted upon him. Cold sweat stood out on his taut muscles. The magistrate kept up his merciless questioning while the trooper drew quick, searing lines across the hapless prisoner's torso. Yet, despite his anguish, which drove him to attempt any answer that might be pleasing to the judge, Winchester could only stick to his story. The truth-compelling serum was too much for him.

"Bah!" snorted the magistrate at last. He is a hard one. It is too bad we cannot give him the second degree, but Prince Lohan has ordered he be kept alive. Take him to the Moon. We'll let him cull meteors for a year

or two. Perhaps by then he'll talk. Next!"

The next was a miserable group of slaves, similar to the one who had operated the lawn-mower. In fact, that unhappy wreck of a man was one of them. But there was one slave who did not fawn and cringe. He was a tall, bald old man with a piercing eye and a patriarchal beard. He bore himself with an air of authority and dignity in striking contrast to the cheap slave's garb he wore. He stepped without hesitation before the magistrate.

"Excellency," he said, tapping his forehead with a finger, "my grandson is one of the weak-minded. It is for that reason that I have kept him hidden since babyhood—and his sister. It would have brought shame upon my household."

"Ha!" exclaimed the judge. "Shame on a slave's household—how droll!"

The old man stared back at him in patient dignity.

"These other men of my community, of which his lordship was kind enough to give me the sub-mayorship, have known nothing of my deception. They are innocent of wrong-doing. The fault is mine and mine alone."

"It matters not," cried the judge harshly. "The law of the Khan is just. The law of the Khan must be obeyed! The rule is that wherever an unbranded slave is found, the headman of the village and every tenth man in it shall be doomed to hard labor on the Moon. Your effort at evasion is of no avail. Officer! Take them away."

Never would Allan Winchester forget his cruel examination. Nor could he rid from his mind the sentence he must now serve.

The forehold of the prison ship was a dreary place. The twelve condemned ordinary slaves of the Lohan estate sat on hard benches and stared stupidly at the floor.

Presently the aged patriarch spoke to Winchester.

"You wonder at my seeming sacrifice, my son? I did it, not for you, but for these poor villagers of mine. I preferred to lie while there was yet time."

"I see," said Winchester. "I'm

sorry I brought this on you. I did not know."

"It does not matter," said the old man with resignation. "I have lived enough. Too long. Of all these I am the only one who knows and remembers the wonderful days before *They* came."

"They?"

"Yes. The rulers, these men from the plateaus of Central Asia, who wormed themselves into places of power and then betrayed their trust. Until then we had enjoyed ten centuries of peace and civilization; we had evolved a veritable Utopia. There was no strife or ambition, except for the better good of all. There was enough for everybody and to spare, while each man did what he was best suited for and received what he needed for his health and happiness."

"We perfected interplanetary travel and colonized and developed the distant bodies. We moved all our machinery and heavy industry to the Moon, where people worked a short term each year, then returned to Earth to enjoy their leisure period. The Earth then, as now, was a garden, except that it was for the use of all, not a small, self-chosen few."

WINCHESTER'S face was puzzled.

"But why," he demanded, "did so many yield to the few?"

"Because," replied the old man sadly, "we did not know how to defend ourselves. There were no weapons. For many generations the doctrine of brute force had been held to be abhorrent. Consequently, when this new breed of conquerors arose, we were caught by surprise. They were a small group, never quite assimilated to the single race that is now a blend of all those that existed before."

"But again, why?" insisted Winchester. "If conditions were so perfect, why should anybody rebel?"

The patriarch's eyes became sad and dispirited.

"There was a Mongoloid by the name of Hanu Sho-Tang, who had an overweening ambition and an imperi-

ous will. He was an able man, and had advanced to be the commander of a large spaceship, but the Regents of Transportation judged him to be unfit for further advancement — he was too dictatorial and harsh to his subordinates to fit our system.

"So he sulked and schemed and sowed discontent among those of similar disposition whom he knew. Above all he read. There were history books then—it was not until he became the Khan that he had them burned."

The patriarch pronounced the title almost in a whisper, and glanced anxiously about him. But none of the other slaves were attentive. They merely sat in stupid despair. He went on.

"He came upon the old histories of the distant past, when there were separate nations and men fought bloody, useless and inconclusive wars. He found the biography of a cruel conqueror named Genghis Khan, and the life-stories of other would-be conquerors—such ineffectual imitators as Napoleon and a creature called Hitler. From your testimony in court, that man must have been about your time."

Winchester nodded with a gleam in his eyes.

"The mongoloid absorbed the philosophies of those men. He declared himself to be the direct descendant of the original Great Khan, and began to spread his doctrines. His own kind accepted them eagerly, and I am ashamed to say, so did many of our own race. It was easy after that for them to seize the supreme power."

He stopped talking and stared out the port.

"There is no hope," mumbled the old man brokenly.

"There is always hope!" said Winchester fiercely. His eyes lit up with the fire of resolution.

He felt a gnarled hand seize him, and was surprised at the warmth and vigor of its grip.

"Ah," said the old man. "If I were only young again!"

"Be young in spirit, then," Winchester challenged. "We shall have work to do!"

He thought of Cynthia then—Cynthia, a slave girl. The blood rushed angrily to his face, and he had to clench his fists to keep them quiet.

CHAPTER V

Break for Liberty

THE area below was vast, and at first sight featureless. It was one of the tracts of the Moon known in the old days as "seas." But as the spaceship prison van approached nearer, Allan Winchester saw that the plain was pimpled over with small hemispherical mounds. Each was ringed with a faint aura of greenish light and connected with neighboring mounds by other slender beams of the same pale rays.

For awhile the ship approached no closer, but spiraled about the Moon as she lost velocity. The convex line of the horizon rolled slowly toward them, as if the Moon was a gigantic ball turning ponderously over. A string of immense craters came into view, and their slopes were studded with hundreds of minor ones.

Winchester saw that many were domed. He understood then why it was that when he had first seen them from the mouth of his cave in Munich, the satellite had appeared set with sparkling jewels. For the domes were of all shapes and colors, some spherical, some ellipsoidal and others polyhedral, showing many glistening facets.

"That is Tycho," pointed the old man to one larger than the rest, crested with a translucent dome that shimmered like polished mother-of-pearl. "In it is the great city of Cosmopolis, the largest in the System. There are the dormitories of the industrial slaves, the textile mills and many machine shops.

"The variegated colors show where the foreign quarters are, where the Martians and the Venusians live, and so on, each under his own planetary conditions. Beyond it, on that pinnacle, is the Great Observatory, one

of the five located on the Moon."

"How do you know these things?" queried Winchester.

"I served here for thirty years," sighed the patriarch. "When my strength and skill failed, they reduced me to a domestic slave and sent me back to Earth to be headman of Prince Lohan's cattle herd."



The paralyzer beam froze Winchester in his tracks the moment he struck the first trooper (Chap. III)

The ship headed down into a vast, undomed crater. There were many spaceships of various size squatting here and there on its bottom. Ungainly, high-wheeled vehicles were to be seen crawling to and from them.

What appeared to be row upon row of iridescent soap bubbles, clinging to the base of the ten-thousand-foot cliffs that ringed the landing field, proved on closer approach as many small domes.

"Grand Central Station," explained the aged headman. "The huge interplanetary liners take off and arrive here—the gravity is so much less than on Earth. Passengers from Earth come over on small ferries like this one. Freighters have a port of their own, near the mining and smelter

craters, and the Space Fleet uses the Military Base in Proclus, where the Academy and the Grand Arsenal are."

His words were cut short as they were hurled against the glassine visiport by the sudden increment of deceleration. For a moment Winchester was too dazed to see anything clearly. When he looked again, the prison van was gliding to a smooth stop not far from a grim, gray dome. At once, one of the awkward, high-wheeled buggies slid out of a portal in the dome's side and rolled toward them.

"A ground tender," grunted the old man. "Saves putting everybody in space-suits. There's no air out there."

In a moment two guards came in, ray-guns drawn and in hand.

"Fall in, slaves," one cried. "About face! March."

In double rank the condemned slaves shambled ahead into a corridor, turned a corner and went through the ship's lateral spacelock. Coupled to it was a bridge leading to the wheeled tender. Winchester and the aged patriarch brought up the rear, doors clanged behind them. The tender lurched and rumbled off, its wheels bumping grittily over the irregular crater bottom.

WINCHESTER cast a look about the chamber he was now in. It was cubical, all steel. There was no opening whatever, except the now closed outer door by which they had come in, though there were small lenses set in the plating of the polished wall opposite. These were probably peepholes through which the prisoners could be watched or counted. There could be no escape.

The van jolted on, then stopped jerkily. The clang of interlocking metal broke the silence. Then the door slid back again, revealing a short, arched corridor, lined with guards.

"Single file, swine," bawled the nearest trooper. "When you come to the sacred mark in the pavement, kneel and show your marks."

The leading peasant shuffled forward, his shoulders stooped and his dull gaze fixed on the pavement a

yard ahead of him, as was required of slaves. The rest of the poor wrecks followed. As they reached the place where a golden sunburst was embedded in the concrete floor, each paused and made a kow-tow, while a policeman noted the symbols on his back and checked them against his list.

"Hey!" yelled the recorder, on examining the third one. "Whoever put this guy's marks on did a sloppy job. Touch 'em up—make the figures more distinct."

The entire line was halted while the wretch was dragged out and strapped, moaning, to a cross like structure of steel set in a niche. He faced the wall while the guards brought up a machine mounted on a rolling tripod. The policeman consulted the record, set certain knobs, and focused. He tripped a switch and lavender fire flashed out of the brander, retracing the faded distinguishing numerals.

The man screamed once, then dangled helplessly in his bonds. Winchester saw and sickened. He had no brand as yet. If he was to escape, it was now or never.

He waited until it came his turn to kneel and bump his face to the sunburst set in the floor. Until that instant he had imitated the slovenly, hopeless shamble of the beaten slaves ahead of him. But out of the corner of his eye he had stolen glimpses of the guards about him. They were lollying contemptuously against the wall, serene in the belief that these trapped creatures were so spineless that they could be trusted to follow the routine like blind sheep.

Allan Winchester went into action like a springing leopard. He jerked up his head, saw at one swift glance that he was on the threshold of a vast circular open space on the order of an ancient coliseum. Groups of gray-clad slaves huddled in spots on the sands of its floor. Many doors led off it, and only a few were visibly guarded.

Winchester sprang sideward, snatching the weapon from the surprised hand of the guard that stood nearest to him. With a bound he leaped past and into the arena, then

turned sharply and ran along one of its curving walls.

Shouts rose behind him, as the startled guards comprehended that a slave had been so audacious as to break out of line, snatch a gun and run away. Winchester heard the faint spattling of deadly rays. Violet streaks of light hurtled past him and ricocheted from the stones ahead, leaving mushy-looking incandescent spots wherever they hit.

He ducked low and dodged into the first door he came to. An astonished guard, who had been sitting on a stool just inside the arch, half rose, only to be butted sprawling as Winchester, still charging head down, collided full force with him.

Winchester staggered five strides beyond, then recovered his balance and sprinted on. He barely made the turn ahead, when once more the hissing streams of electronic fire came lashing after him. Before him lay a maze of twisting passages, along which were closed doors. He dared not stop to test any, but dodged onward, ever turning just ahead of the hot fire of his pursuers.

GONGS began to ring and sirens wail. A new guard jumped out into the passage dead ahead of him and leveled a weapon.

Winchester checked his headlong flight and slid to a stop, jerking to one side, just as the guard pulled his trigger. A flash, much like that of a single bolt of lightning, flared through the spot he had just side-stepped, spent itself against the wall at the far end of the corridor with a spatter of blinding light and an ear-splitting crash. Fervently hoping that pressure on the trigger was all he needed, Winchester lifted his own weapon and pointed it at his adversary. He squeezed.

Involuntarily he closed his eyes, for the effect was blinding, almost stunning. He blinked them open. There was nothing ahead of him, except a wreath of acrid smoke and the charred stumps of two shins sticking up out of a pair of boots. The rest of the guard had disintegrated!

Winchester shuddered and ran on,

clinging lovingly to his weapon. It gave him an assurance he had not had before. He turned more corners, but though the gongs kept on clanging, no one else appeared to halt him. Finally, winded and panting, he stopped to take stock. He realized suddenly that for some seconds now there had been no avenging pursuers behind him. That realization, instead of being cheering, somehow seemed ominous.

The gongs that had been ringing abruptly ceased. A new set of a different tone clanged twice, then went silent. Down the corridor a red lamp in a socket blazed up, winked twice and went out. Winchester did not know what these new signals signified, but he took the first turn and began to run again.

Then violent and numbing pain seized him. He gasped out one strangled moan and fell. Then he knew he was lying there rigid, struck down by the same sort of force that had laid him low when he met the first policeman. He was paralyzed. Helpless. He listened, expecting to hear onrushing guards. But to his ears there came no sound.

He was down, frozen, pinned no doubt by an ambush ray. Perhaps no one would ever come. Why should they? What worse could they do to him?

CHAPTER VI

The Meteor-Cullers

WHEN Allan Winchester came to his full senses again, he was sitting in a relatively small room on a bench. Other men were there with him, but for awhile he was too sick and dazed to notice them.

It had been a fiendishly cruel twenty hours or so since they found him and bore him off to the torture chamber. First they had spreadeagled him face down and applied his distinguishing numerals, which in itself had been as ordeal of the first magnitude.

After that they had submitted him

to the same torture given in the courtroom at his first hearing. When they had tired of that, they subjected him to yet others—all different, and all unbearable.

Now he sat waiting dazedly for whatever was to follow next. Presently he was able to take more notice of those about him. They were men like himself, non-Mongoloids, or of the slave class. But they were quite different from the spiritless creatures who had been his companions on the trip from New Vienna to the Moon.

These men swaggered and boasted and gloated over their "crimes." They, evidently, were high-spirited men and unbreakable short of death itself. Indeed, Winchester later came to know their designation, as well as his own. They formed the fast-dwindling rearguard of individualism. They were known as the Incorrigibles.

One came over and examined Winchester's raw back. It was easy to do, for none wore more clothes than a simple canvas girdle.

"Aha, fellows!" he shouted. "A new member for our club. See, he's been awarded the Red Star, and his number is higher even than Teddy's."

To show Winchester what he meant, he turned his own back and displayed his markings. Surcharged over the faint bluish script that made up his personal designation was a glaring crimson star and beneath it a numeral, also in red.

"Super-criminal, that means," the fellow grinned, turning back. "My name's Heim—ex-chief chemist of North American Plastics. I had a good job for a while in the labs in Copernicus, but they juggled me time after time for minor nonconformity. Finally I burned down an AFPA man and they hung the Red Star on me.

"But what the devil! Let 'em do their worst. I'd rather have it that way than go to their confounded Crater of Dreams and work for them for the next half century!"

"Sh-h-h, you fool!" hissed another. "Don't you know they are listening? Or do you really want to go to the Crater of Dreams?"

"Maybe I do," said Heim mockingly.

ly, "and maybe that's my play. Let's see if they are clever enough to work it out." He winked at Winchester.

Winchester grinned back. He liked the fellow, though he had little idea of what he was talking about. The man stood before him, cheerful and unsubdued, notwithstanding the hard lines on his face that told all too plainly that he had suffered fiendishly contrived tortures.

"You're way ahead of me, boys," Winchester managed painfully.

He suddenly discovered that his jaws were nearly locked as the aftermath of a certain treatment called by the guards the "Q-27." In the kaleidoscope of torture, he had forgot the one which seared the tongue and made every tooth ache abominably.

"But," he went on, "I'm one of you. Where do we go from here?"

Heim shrugged.

"You never know. They like to play with you cat-and-mouse style. But I can tell you one thing. Making a break like you did the other day won't buy you anything. They always get you in the end. Every few feet along these corridor walls is a concealed paralysis-ray projector, worked by distant control.

"Guards and trustees are warned by signal lights and gongs. They step clear and wait, while we poor devils rush right into the rays. After that, it is easy to pick you up and give you the works."

"I see," said Winchester, realizing how futile his break had been. At the same time he drew a grim satisfaction in recalling that he had cut one of the scoundrels down.

PRESENTLY guards swarmed in, alert and vigilant, for they knew the desperate type of men they had to deal with.

"Okay, you hard guys," said the leader, "on your toes. We'll give you a chance to work off some steam. Fall in, single file."

They went to the meteor fields in the airtight buggies used to convey air-breathers across the undomed areas. There were many stops as they came to the barriers formed by the

pale green horizontal rays. At making certain code signals, the ray disappeared long enough to permit the cart to proceed and then showed up again behind it.

"Force walls," whispered Heim into Winchester's ear. "They are impenetrable and burn like fire. The whole plain is crisscrossed with them and each slave hut is surrounded by them. It is their control system and unbeatable."

Winchester looked out glumly, but with deep interest. He counted the barriers they crossed and noted there were more than twenty. In between lay wastes of cracked and shattered granite bedrock, strewn with gravel and metallic boulders. He saw many lines of rails with small flat-cars standing on sidings, and once he noticed a group of slaves laboriously pushing one that was piled high with meteoric matter.

At length they came to a heavily armored dome in the midst of the field. There the cargo of fresh human victims was unloaded. In the grueling days that followed, Winchester came to learn the system well.

Each dome held dormitories and kitchens for the slaves, and guard rooms for their supervisors. In the center of each was a huge hopper into which the flat-cars were dumped. Winchester was given to understand that the hopper fed the loads to a subway freight system, connecting all the domes and the smelters beyond the field. The domes themselves were surrounded by rings of force, which were only broken to let the cullers in and out.

As for the cullers, the rule was simplicity itself. They were sent out in groups, unguarded, clad in armored suits containing water and air enough for twenty hours' operation. If, within, twenty hours, they brought back as many tons of ore, they were admitted to the dome and given food and rest, then sent out again. If not, they stayed outside to die of asphyxiation or thirst.

When the sun was shining, the plain was blindingly bright and searingly hot. When the sun was on the far side, all was bleak and biting cold. And unceasingly the cullers were subjected to the hazard of pelting meteors, which fell with terrific velocity and usually burst into a thousand hurtling fragments on impact.

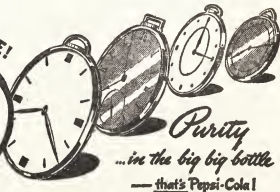
"You see," explained Heim one day, "the whole set-up of these fields is to protect the domed craters. There are towers set at strategic points, which set up magnetic strains in the void overhead, attracting all the loose stuff to these chosen areas. The meteor falls are so heavy and so constant, these areas would soon be buried deep unless the fragments were continually picked up and carted away.

"Our rulers combine the need of doing that with punishment of criminals, so they send us. The mortality is terrific, but who cares? There are plenty of us. Besides, they get quite a lot of valuable by-products, such as platinum, iridium and diamonds."

Winchester gritted his teeth and hung on.

One night, after a quota haul done in less than ten hours, he and Heim

[Turn page]



and others were gathered around the mess table, singing. A former spaceship hand had made a guitar of sorts out of scraps of wood and bits of wire, and it was he who strummed the accompaniment.

The gaiety was forced, because all were dead tired, but they acted their parts vigorously, knowing that it irritated the guards to see any reaction but cowed misery.

Heim would lead off, and all would join in the refrain, thumping merrily on the table.

Oh, have you seen my Martian love,
The one that is so sweet?
She's feathered like a turtle-dove
With pseudopods for feet.

Oh, she's grand, she's tops, she's neat,
She's a monster, sure—but awfully sweet!

Oh, have you seen my Martian girl,
The one that is so fair,
And note how quaintly her antennae curl,
How wondrous green her hair?

Oh, have you seen my Martian maid,
The one I love so well?
Her snout plates are of purest jade,
To match her tummy scale.

They all jumped up and did a snake dance around the room, bellowing out the refrain while amazed guards looked on. A petty officer quietly sneaked from the room, a worried look on his face. The next stanza was led off by Winchester.

Oh, have you seen that Martian lass,
The one who drives me wild?
Her breath is purest methane gas
And leaves me quite beguiled.

Oh, have you seen my Martian belle,
The one with the lidless eyes?
It's true she cannot kiss so well,
But—golly, boy!—she tries!

Oh, she's grand, she's tops, she's swell,
She's a monster—

Suddenly the clamor of a gong drowned the song. A door slid open and a fully armed captain of the guards stood on the threshold.

"Silence!" he roared, glaring about him.

The singing stopped and a score of amused faces stared back with mock interest in their eyes.

"We have been watching you men,"

announced the guard captain, after an ominous pause, "and it appears we have been too easy on you. I have reported the matter to the Commandant and he agrees that other duty is in order. The van is at the portal. Fall in—and stand at attention! As your numbers are called, step forward."

CHAPTER VII

Transplanted Planet

NO inmate of the ferrous industry's big No. 4 plant ever saw the massive dome that covered it. All one could see, looking upward from the grimy crater floor, were rolling clouds of sulfurous smoke lit by the glare of blast furnaces, or the riotous shower of sparks as some ingot mold overflowed.

Gigantic rollers flattened out the white-hot billets fed to them, or squeezed them into strange shapes. The place had a strong flavor of the Inferno of the ancients, and the illusion was completed by the occasional glimpse of half-naked, sweating men tending the hot machines.

These were the condemned, and perched in elevated nests about the place were the demons—the ever-present slave guards.

Winchester had a place in it. Stripped to his loin cloth, he tended a huge stamp that pounded and roared, crushing the endless stream of iron-oxide brought to it by a conveyor. From the stamp the rusty fragments flowed over sorting screens, and then fell into squat gondolas crawling along on the tracks beneath.

From time to time a ponderous, atomic-powered locomotive would come and drag away the loaded cars. For days Winchester watched the spectacle in dull wonder. Iron-rust deliberately produced in oxygen furnaces and exported by the millions of cubic yards! And this in a place where virgin metallic iron could be had for the picking up, and oxygen literally worth its weight in diamonds!

Something nudged Winchester, and he heard a shout in his ear.

"Let that go!" yelled a guard, cupping his hands to make himself heard above the din. "Get down on the floor—a new detail for you!"

Winchester nodded and dropped the wrench he had in his hand. He had learned the folly of resisting every little order. He must save his fight for the really big issue that was sure to come. That is, if he could only stick it out long enough.

He clambered down the rickety ladders to the cinder-strewn floor. A three-hundred-car train of loaded cars blocked any further movement except along the track. Another guard jerked a thumb and Winchester turned in that direction.

Hundreds of feet along, he came to another group of guards standing beside what proved to be the last car of the train. They motioned for him to climb its steps and enter. He did, and noted with mild surprise that its doors were fitted with gaskets and holding-down dogs, and that the car windows were similarly equipped. In fact, the caboose had more the appearance of a ship's compartment than of a railroad coach.

Winchester settled himself without a word on one of the longitudinal benches. There were other convicts with him—red star men, all—but none he knew. They were big huskies and apparently inured to hard labor. Bundles of short-handled scoops tied with wire filled the rear corner of the car.

Presently a guard came in and closed and sealed the doors and ports. The train slowly started off. It proceeded a little way, then stopped. After that it went on, but in utter darkness, until after a time it emerged into the brilliant light of the sun-flooded Lunar plain.

"A life-size airlock, that," commented one of the prisoners.

"Yeah," agreed the man next to him. "Smack through the crater rim. Wonder what's up?"

"Dunno. Heard something about their building a new Martian Embassy over in Sevinus. His nibs, the ambassador, gets homesick for his deserts.

That's what all this rust is for, I think. It costs plenty, but what of it? He's got it. Married a sister of that slant-eyed Prince Lohan, I hear—"

"Pipe down, you two," snarled a guard, and the conversation stopped.

THE train skirted the plain, which was evidently one of the meteor-bombarded areas, then crawled through foothills of small craters. It came in due course to a steep mountain and entered a deep tunnel. Again there was darkness and a long stop. The guards undogged the ports and threw them open. Winchester took a deep breath of the new air and found it mildly exhilarating. It was thin and dry and also cool.

An ex-spaceman sniffed knowingly. "Yep. It's Mars, all right."

When the train came out into the crater itself, Winchester's surprised eyes were treated to a sight he had often dreamed of in his earlier existence, but never thought he would live to see.

The dome-workers had done their job and gone. Overhead was what looked to be a dusty, dirty-greenish sky; and through some trick of refraction, the oversized Sun of Luna had been reduced to the hazy, dimmer spot of light it seems to be from Mars.

The crater floor was already covered for miles with leveled iron-rust. It shimmered with the ruddy, characteristic color of the fourth planet.

Further on they came to mounds and dumps of rust which had not yet been spread. Slave-operated tractors were at work, dragging it away with giant scrapers, and supervisors carrying photographs were showing them where and how to shape it into the mounds and hummocks that abound in the Martian desert.

The work-train pulled on beyond a little way and then began to dump its load. Off toward the center of the crater, Winchester could see a group of pyramidal stone buildings crawling with workmen. That, he presumed, was to be the new Martian Embassy.

"Don't need any more spreaders," said a guard, coming up. "Take these guys over to the West Portal and put

'em to work there. A shipment of stuff is due from the Botanical Gardens and is gotta be planted around. Tricky things, them Martian plants—you always wind up with less men than you started with. So be sure you put your tough eggs on the job, men you won't mind losing."

"I gotcha," said the train guard, grinning. "Well, they can have this whole lot and never squeeze a tear out of my eye." He turned to his charges. "Come on, you bozos. Pick up those shovels and march. We're legging it across to the other side."

Hours later the dusty convicts were brought to a weary halt beside a string of flat-cars.

"Here you go," said a man, coming out from behind the cars.

He was tall and thin, wore horn-rimmed glasses and looked more like a college professor than conductor of a work-train. He was not a Mongoloid, but he bore himself with authority.

"Thirty choice Martian phygrices here. They go into those holes. Handle 'em with care, they're man-eating. But whatever you do, don't burn one down. Those are strict orders from the Director himself. They're very valuable and rare specimens."

He poked a receipt for the plants at the convict guard.

"Sign this and I'll go on back to the Botanical Gardens and send up some moss. In an hour or so you'll get a train of desert goats. Feed them to these plants after they're bedded in. Two goats to a phygrix is about right. S'long."

He pocketed the signed receipt for the cargo and swung himself up into the cab of the waiting locomotive. Winchester looked from him to the boxed plants with interest. Each plant bore a sign.

Martian pitcher-plant.
Dangerous!
Handle with caution.

"What's dangerous about 'em?" asked a convict.

"How do I know?" replied the guard. "Watch your step, that's all. Grab a couple of loose rails over there and let's skid 'em onto the

ground and have a look at them."

Winchester examined one of the plants after it was on the ground and unboxed, but he failed to see anything hazardous-looking about it. The thing had a fat, bulbous root some ten feet in diameter that was covered with a leathery skin. Its upper part consisted of a number of fleshy leaves of from six to eight feet in length, temporarily bound together with turns of ire rope. In general, it resembled an earthy maguey plant.

THE gang slid them one by one across the gravelly waste, and lowered them into their holes. By quitting time, the entire thirty had been transplanted and the backfill done. Winchester and another man began taking the ropes off the bound leaves. "Hold on," he warned, as he loosened the last knot. "Let's get out of reach before we unwind them."

He jumped back a good ten feet, holding the stray end of the line in his hand. For being so close, he could not miss the fetid breath of the thing, knew without doubt that the plant was carnivorous. But at the same time, Winchester thought he understood its method of attack.

Each of the fleshy leaves terminated in what was the caricature of a human hand. A tough, horny palm divided on one side into three muscular fingers. Growing out of the other side was an opposed thumb.

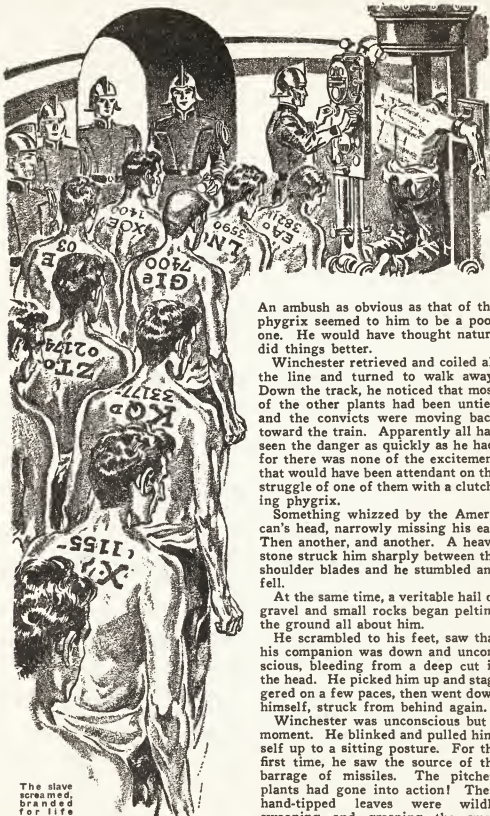
As the bonds were loosened, the fingers and thumbs kept opening and closing spasmodically, and tremors could be felt running up the leafy arms.

From the safe distance where he stood, Winchester began hauling the slack line to him and making it up into a coil. Meanwhile, the released leaves began to weave about and thresh the air, as if warming up after their long confinement.

"I'd hate to have that thing grab me," remarked his fellow convict.

"Yeah," agreed Winchester, looking dubiously at the menacing clump of leaves.

He was wondering how a plant that smelled so vilely could induce any living thing to come within its reach.



The slave
screamed,
branded
for life
(Chap. V)

An ambush as obvious as that of the phygrix seemed to him to be a poor one. He would have thought nature did things better.

Winchester retrieved and coiled all the line and turned to walk away. Down the track, he noticed that most of the other plants had been untied and the convicts were moving back toward the train. Apparently all had seen the danger as quickly as he had, for there was none of the excitement that would have been attendant on the struggle of one of them with a clutching phygrix.

Something whizzed by the American's head, narrowly missing his ear. Then another, and another. A heavy stone struck him sharply between the shoulder blades and he stumbled and fell.

At the same time, a veritable hail of gravel and small rocks began pelting the ground all about him.

He scrambled to his feet, saw that his companion was down and unconscious, bleeding from a deep cut in the head. He picked him up and staggered on a few paces, then went down himself, struck from behind again.

Winchester was unconscious but a moment. He blinked and pulled himself up to a sitting posture. For the first time, he saw the source of the barrage of missiles. The pitcher-plants had gone into action! Their hand-tipped leaves were wildly swooping and grasping the small

stones that lay near them. They hurled the stones with deadly accuracy at everything in the vicinity that moved.

From the inner recesses of the plant cluster, slender, slimy antennae snaked out. These were long—sixty feet or longer—and while some retrieved and brought back the hurled stones for further casting, others groped the ground for unconscious victims.

Winchester was appalled to see one of the feelers wrap itself around the form of a convict off to his left and drag it toward the plant itself. He turned his head quickly, just in time to see another of the antennae slithering toward him.

Dizzy and bleeding though he was, he managed to stagger to his feet, with his companion's body thrown across his shoulder. He must have made another ten feet of retreat good when one last well-aimed stone brought him down. Things in his vision swirled madly a moment and then went black.

CHAPTER VIII

An Old Enemy

THE clickety-clack of wheels on trail joints was the first sound Winchester recognized. Then he knew he was lying on his back on one of the benches in the caboose. He heard the low voices of grumbling convicts.

"The dirty heels!" one was saying. "They wouldn't pull a trigger to fry one of those plants, but they'd burn us down as soon as look at us. 'Valuable plants,' the rat said, 'strict orders not to hurt 'em.' Huh!"

"How many guys did they get?"

"Six. And there woulda been two more if this fellow didn't have what it takes."

Winchester opened his eyes. The bruises and cuts smarted, but he sat up. Someone had put crude bandages on him, after dragging him out of the reach of the pitcher-plant.

"Where to now?" he asked.

"Central Receiving—same place you landed when you first came out. It's close by and a handier place to lock us up for the rest period than to put up camps in the desert. Oh, we'll be back. There's more funny stuff to be planted in that crater before his nibs, the Martian ambassador, thinks it looks like Home, Sweet Home. Not only plants but animals. Like neuriverons, for example."

"Neuriverons?"

"Yeah—Martian thrill-suckers. A kind of mosquito. It's what they call 'anaelectric.' That's the opposite of electric. Instead of giving off current, they live on it. They're tough on exposed wiring, and can drill anything but armored cable. They like human currents, too—that's why they call 'em neuriverons.

"A cloud of 'em will pester you, buzzing and stinging, until you get fighting mad. Then they close up and sink their drills into you—into nerves, if they can find 'em. Ten or twelve will drive a man into fits. Some people go stark crazy. A comfy place, Mars is!"

But Winchester learned no more about Mars that day. The train was slowing for the airlock. In a few minutes he would be back at the place where he first started as a branded criminal.

A gate guard cheked off each man as he entered, and another handed each his ration for the day—a greasy black pellet compounded of just the food elements needed, and no more. This and an occasional swig of synthetic water was all the nourishment a convict rated. In the hydroponic gardens of Hipparchus, they said, vegetables of every sort grew profusely. But these were for the masters.

The detail filed on into the circular open space under the main dome and threw themselves down on the sand. They could sleep or rest so many hours, then their trick would go on again. Winchester was glad to notice his friend Heim, squatting in another group not ten yards away.

"How ya doing?" grinned Heim, looking at the American's bandages.

Heim held out his own hands for exhibition. They were stained to the elbows a brilliant, bilious green. Winchester took a look around, saw no guards were watching, so he rolled across the intervening space and joined his former gang-mate. For an hour they chatted, comparing notes.

Heim was working at the quarantine station. For a week he had been dipping Uranian trabblenuts in a strongly antiseptic fluid, so as to rid them of the dangerous mold spores originating in that far-off planet. Due to some peculiarity of the trabblenut's shell, it was a job that had to be done by hand. An interplanetary fruiter had just brought in ten thousand tons of them.

As they talked on about various topics, Winchester learned more details of the warped civilization into which he had blundered. All his race, for one thing, were not slaves or convicts by any means. There were many classes and gradations.

IN Cosmopolis, the industrial center, nearly all the key posts were held by Westerners. They lived on a decent scale, and the more important of them were even allowed a domestic slave or so. From the so-called "free labor" class, up to the superintendents, men were holding the same jobs they would have held before the Mongoloids took over.

"The difference is," explained Heim, "that our fathers worked only a tenth as hard and got more for it. But in those days, they produced the necessities and common luxuries, not the useless expensive things these present-day rulers want. Imagine having an embroidered carpet a mile square made for use at a single garden party, to be burned afterwards because it is soiled with spilled wine and food!"

Winchester growled softly.

"Of course," Heim went on, "there is still plenty of useful work done. For that even the Mongoloids need technicians, so they let people of that class pretty much alone. That goes for scientists and a lot of other specialists. The rule is that if you are useful to them, you get by. You could

get out of here in twenty-four hours if you would play their game."

"Like what?"

"Turn stool, if you can't do anything else. A lot of these guards got their start that way."

"When I sell my soul," said Winchester fervently, "it will be for a better price than any you've mentioned."

Just then there was a commotion at the outer door. After a moment's delay, a strange-looking group of men was brought in and led across the arena. They were accompanied by guards, but it was plain to see that they were not slaves; nor did they have the hard, strained look of convicts.

Moreover, most of them were richly dressed. Their costumes were of gay-colored silks and satins, in many cases embroidered with gold lace. They staggered as they walked, as if slightly tipsy, and here and there a solicitous guard offered a helping hand.

"There is still another class," whispered Heim, pointing. "These are artists. That fellow in the white velvet is a great composer. The guy directly behind him is a poet. The rest are sculptors, dramatists, novelists and such. For one reason or another, they are washed up and through with conscious life."

"They are on their way now to the Crater of Dreams. They will never work again, but from now on will live in a golden haze created by their own imagination—maybe for years and years."

Winchester looked puzzled.

"It's the dope-pit they're going to, to put it another way," Heim explained. A place filled with wild Venusian Lotus. Lotus fruit will keep a man alive indefinitely, but its fumes are maddening. Once a man has been exposed to it, he becomes an incurable addict. After that he only lives to dream.

"Look!" Heim exclaimed a moment later.

Now the intellectuals were retracing their steps to the port by which they had entered. But whereas they were bareheaded when they first came, now each wore a gleaming helmet.

The metal covered only the top and back of the skull. A metallic chin-strap held it on, leaving the features uncovered and free.

"There's the answer. Those helmets are locked on. They are telepath-transmitters, and each has its own special wavelength. The overlord who owns an artist is given the corresponding receiver. He can listen in at will on his subject's dreams, enjoy the exhilaration of a high-grade mind under the stimulus of the universe's most potent drug—yet suffer none of the bad physical effects.

"Suppose you loved music. Imagine what gorgeous symphonies that fellow in white will think of when he is hopped up with Lotus!"

"Yes," muttered Winchester darkly. "But think of the things some other men think when they are drugged."

"Exactly. They use this type, too. The last chief executioner was retired and sent there. I understand he inspires his successor. These Mongoloids employ an incredible number of ways to put a man to death. Then there are other varieties of dreams. They have hooked up some so they can be broadcast. They do that at their annual feasts."

Winchester bit his lip to conceal his intense disgust.

TEN work periods came and went and the Martian Embassy neared completion. By dint of hard work and implicit obedience, Winchester had made himself a sort of unofficial strawboss. Guards ceased to prod him, often gave him a handful of men to manage, and left him alone to do what was assigned.

It was one morning, just as the gang had been lined up for the march to the train, when strident trumpet calls rent the air. Gongs sounded and the loud-speaker system bellowed.

"Down, slaves! Down all. Remain at kow-tow until the order to rise. Guards below the rank of captain will do the same. Attention! The great prince approaches."

The prisoners sullenly bared their shoulders and dropped to their knees. Then they pillowed their faces in the sand, in the absurdly grotesque

humiliation of the kow-tow. Winchester risked a peek and saw the lesser guards follow suit. There was a moment of tense silence, then the abased throng could hear the rustle of silks and soft laughter and light conversation.

The high-ranking guests appeared to be entering through the portal leading from the Earth-ferry landing. They would proceed through the dome to the railroad station. Winchester stole another look, but all he saw were several pairs of twinkling, sandaled feet and a glimpse of the imperial yellow affected by the highest lords.

Trumpets blared again. At "Up," the groveling convicts rose and sheepishly brushed the sand from their faces.

"Slant-eyed is inspecting our job today," hissed the one nearest Winchester. "God help us if we've done anything wrong! Lohan never forgets and never forgives."

"Prince Lohan, huh?" said Allan Winchester.

His eyes went as hard as chilled steel.

CHAPTER IX

Dangerous Encounter

THAT day Winchester was transplanting moss. It was the notorious Martian migratory moss, a creeping, leafy slime that ceaselessly seeks the sun. Winchester had learned its trait the first time he had handled it, and now he turned it to account.

He had swung his boatswain's chair from a hook high up the crater cliff. To an adjacent hook he had rigged a pulley, by which he hauled the reeking stuff up in a basket from the flat-car two hundred feet below. It was easy to plant acres of the stuff that way. For the spot Winchester chose was just within the shadow made by the crater's brink. Since from the Moon the Sun moves slowly, he rarely had to change his position.

He plastered half a basket of the

slippery plant against the flat granite of the cliff, then waited while it crawled away toward the nearby area. Then he picked up his trowel and dipped it into the basket again. When the basket was empty, he sent it down to the car below.

Presently Winchester felt the tug



Cynthia's horror-stricken gaze loomed up on the forbidden televisior screen (Chap. XVII)

that told him the basket was full again. By the time the basketful had been spread upon the cliff, the situation behind him had changed. A train had come up and was stopped a short dis-

tance away. It consisted of a locomotive and single car, but such a locomotive and car as Winchester could never have imagined.

Both were plated with gold and studded with insets of what must have been massed jewels; for no single stones could have been so large.

Gaily liveried flunkies were unloading from the front compartment what appeared to be wheeled chairs. In a moment Winchester understood that

was exactly what they were—super-rickshas, quite as rich and elegant in their way as the train was in its. As soon as the rickshas were ready and ranged beside the coach, the princely party stepped out.

Winchester recognized Prince Lohan by his height and yellow robe. He judged the squat, swarthy man beside him in rich red to be the Martian envoy. Their conveyances rolled off first, leaving the women of the party to follow as they chose.

Winchester turned back to his work. It was not until he had emptied another basketload of moss that he looked again. The party had gone far out into the desert and was circling to the north. Winchester started when he observed a single parked ricksha standing in the brush not a great distance away, between him and the private train.

A daintily dressed woman strolled near it, idly looking over the plants. Evidently she had not cared for the longer trip out into the desert, and had quit the party early. But the thing that alarmed Winchester was that she was but a few hundred yards away from a thick growth of the deadly phygrix!

Without stopping to think of the possible consequences, Winchester slipped out of the boatswain's chair and sprang onto the moss-basket. He gave a quick series of jerks on the hauling-down line. It mattered not to him that it was considered sacrilege and punishable by death for an ordinary slave, let alone a convict, to approach directly any member of the royal household, whatever the emergency.

He hit the ground and snatched up a coil of light rope meant for hoisting service. Then he dashed off through the brush in the direction he had last seen the woman. When he broke cover on the opposite side, he saw at once he was too late. The phygrices had gone to work. Already the many-handed clusters of green were scooping up stones and gravel and flinging them at the woman.

She stood still amidst a dozen clumps, clasp her hands and screaming. There was one giant cac-

tus near her, but it offered no shelter against the pelting missiles and far too spiny to be climbed, even had she the strength and agility. A stone struck her behind the ear, and with a little moan she sank to earth.

HER two guards and the ricksha pullers, who had been dawdling in the vicinity of the conveyance, started forward, shouting at the tops of their voices. The guards drew their flammers, but hardly had the hot rays spouted forth than both fell, struck fairly in the face with pitched rocks.

The ricksha slaves, seeing how hopeless it was, turned to run, but they were too late. The barrage of gravel brought them down, too. In the same instant, the ominous retriever tentacles began to rise from the heart of the plants and reach out for their newest victims.

Winchester took it all in at a glance. Without a moment's hesitation he dropped the rope he was carrying and dashed back into the brush. He remembered in a flash that he had seen the refrigerator men's repair car parked on a short siding. It was an open car, and therefore might contain the one thing he needed.

He found it, and sprang aboard, heedless of the expostulations of the "freeman" who had been left in charge. Yes, there were the heavy helmets and the quilted coats men wear when traversing the open spaces of the Moon. He grabbed up a set and sprinted back to where the girl had been, not neglecting to pick up a small hand-ax as he went.

By the time he returned, the sensory plumes by which the pitcher-plants were informed had done their work. The barrage of stones had subsided, except for a few nervous leaves, which kept on tossing missiles at random as if unable to stop. One guard was being dragged into the very heart of a plant, while feelers from two neighboring clumps were engaging in a tug of war over the body of the other.

A ricksha man had disappeared entirely. The other was almost invisible in his wrappings of coiled antennae.

In another minute he would be gone as well.

But the girl! So far she had been untouched, except for the missiles. Several tentacles were creeping toward her, casting about in their blind way, but the nearest had more than a yard to go before it found her. Winchester slapped on his helmet and donned the coat. He hooked the ax to his belt, picked up his rope again, and boldly stepped out.

As he expected, he had not gone more than a dozen paces when the sensitive fronds of the killer plants gave their warning. Winchester ducked his head to take the first volley of stones that instantly followed. The rocks clinked against his head-covering or thudded against his body, but although the blows were felt, they were sufficiently muffled not to be fatal.

WINCHESTER ran steadily, taking care to give the girl's prone form a wide berth, so as to draw the fire well away from her. He paused only long enough to hack at two of the feelers that spread across his path. That rid the girl of half her attackers. He might yet have time to deal with the pair coming up from the other side.

He stopped beside the cactus tree. By then he had slipped a knot in the end of his rope and had a noose flowing. He moved away just far enough for a free swing and swung his lariat. It was an art he had almost forgotten, but what is learned in childhood has remarkable staying powers. He let fly the noose and was overjoyed to see it settle squarely on the nearest phygrix.

Winchester drew it tight with a sudden jerk of his arm and a heave of his body. Then he secured the line fast to the trunk of the cactus and cut it free from the remainder of the coil. One set of pitching arms was drawn tight and immobile. Swiftly he fashioned another noose. After a couple of tries, he had another phygrix lassoed and lashed down.

He attacked a third and a fourth. And then he saw that his line was exhausted. The stray piece he held in

his hand was a scant ten feet long.

But he had silenced four of the enemies. There were but two others in range of him. He set his jaw. Well, he would have to take a little more pelting, but he could shield the girl from that with his body. Until then he had not dared approach her too closely, even to defend her from the antennae. The hail of pitched rocks would have killed her as surely as the mouths of the plants themselves.

Winchester ran back to where the girl lay. One of the feelers had located her and was taking a turn around her waist. He chopped it in two with a single stroke of the ax, yanked the disgusting tip from about the girl's waist and flung it from him.

Disregarding the other feeler altogether, he picked the girl up bodily and started away, dreading each step, lest the pounding he was receiving on the back of the head and shoulder blades should cause him to stumble and fall at any moment.

Winchester and his burden were almost clear when he heard a great shouting. There followed the sound of thunder-guns, spitting out the bolts of artificial lightning to which the American had treated the guard in the corridor of Central Receiving Station.

Out of the corner of his eye, he saw soldiers running and the flame of the guns. And he also saw the greasy clouds of smoke that spurted up when a phygrix went into extinction. His blood curdled at the unexpected shrieks those hideous plants uttered in the moment of their death.

Panting from exhaustion and weary to the point of fainting, Winchester paused and shifted his burden. He eased the position of her drooping head in the hollow of his arm. The girl opened her eyes dreamily and looked up at him. She was not of his own race at all! She was as oriental as Scheherezade or the infamous Tse Hsi!

Guards and officers appeared all around. There was a swish of yellow and Prince Lohan stepped forward extending his arms. Without a word Winchester yielded up his burden. Then, silently and slowly, he stripped

himself of his padded coat and cast aside the heavy helmet.

He stood there facing the dreaded Lohan, face to face and eye to eye. A captain of the guard stepped back, a look of horror on his face. Here was disgrace piled on danger! A princess of the royal blood had been *touched* by a miserable convict!

CHAPTER X

Ray of Hope

"STAY!" cried Prince Lohan, with an imperious wave of his hand.

The captain of the guard, who had just rushed up with additional men dragging the bouncing rickshas behind them, lowered the muzzle of the gun with which he had been on the point of blasting down the insolent slave.

"I know this man of old," Prince Lohan said, "and would speak privately with him. Here, take the woman back to the car and have the maidservants dress her wounds. Go."

The officer bowed submissively and turned to do as he was told. He flicked a finger, and the other soldiers present backed away to a distance beyond earshot. Prince Lohan waited with impatience until the things he had ordered had been done.

"You were he," he said presently, looking intently into Winchester's eyes, "who was found wandering, unbranded, on the north lawn of my Alpine estate."

Winchester acknowledged it by a flicker of the eyelid and an almost imperceptible nod. Now that a second interview with his tormentor had come about, he was resolved to display no weakness or uncertainty. He would not kneel or bow or beg servile favors.

"Ah," said Lohan quietly, as if reading his mood at a glance. "So be it."

He paused for a moment, studying the man before him. Then, as if speaking of the most matter-of-fact things, he went on. If he noticed the slight start of surprise caused by his first few words, he gave no sign.

"It was said to you only this morning, I believe, that Slant-eye never forgets nor forgives. That is a true saying. I do neither. Though you have on several occasions assaulted my men, and killed at least one of them, today you have rendered me a service that will not be forgotten.

"You may be surprised that I have followed your career so closely. But I assure you there is little you have said or done which has not been recorded and duly reported to me. That is because I am much interested in your case.

"It is a rare one. Your tale was so incredible that the judge who examined you chose to believe the villagers instead, though they obviously lied. Upon reviewing the findings, I demoted him for his error and decapitated them for theirs. The severity of your own punishment has been diminished."

Winchester's face muscles throbbed.

"The reason I am able to accept your strange story is that, being a wearer of the royal yellow, I had access to the secret library in the Khanate. When his Potent Highness the Khan, son and successor to the Sacred Ghengiz, burned all the books in the world, he saved some of those dealing with history for his own enlightenment and pleasure.

"I find in some of them that there was such a place as Munich, and that such a war as you spoke of was fought. Furthermore, from the few bits of information we could glean from the mate you brought with you—"

For all his rigid determination, Winchester could not repress a second twitch at those words. Mate? What had Cynthia told them? What had they done with her? The momentary knitting of his brows did not go unremarked.

"Ah," said the prince, "you wonder about her. I keep forgetting that in the barbarous age in which you lived, not only was the impractical doctrine of democracy still alive, but the far sillier one of chivalry."

"Today you have benefited from it," said Winchester stiffly.

Prince Lohan gasped. It was the first time in his life he had been in-

interrupted. His hand instinctively stole to his belt, where as a growing boy he had worn a whip to chastise the insolent. But he seemed suddenly to make allowances for the ancient age from which the man facing him had come.

"Let it pass," said Lohan coldly. "Suffice it that the woman who came with you is well and unharmed, though—let us say, not as comfortable as she might be. Her eventual disposition will depend to some extent on you."

"On me!" cried Winchester, with a short, bitter laugh. "What have I to do with it?"

PRINCE LOHAN'S eyes flared again. This convict emigrant from the far past was trying his patience to the uttermost, and patience was a virtue no Mongoloid had ever had need to cultivate. Yet he must have remembered that it was wily patience and persistent guile that had placed his kind in control. Once more he swallowed his rising anger.

"You have much to do with it. There is a place for you in this world, if you choose to occupy it. In spite of your antiquated notions, you have something in common with us. You fight for what you want; you do not submit tamely, as these other rabbits do. That is quite just and proper, for all good things rightly belong to the strong."

"But heretofore you have made the error of fighting those who are stronger. If you would combine discretion with your determination and resourcefulness, you will go far."

"Meaning," said Winchester slowly, "that if I play along, I can expect a few crumbs from the table?"

"You put it crudely," said Prince Lohan haughtily, "but that is the essence of it. The rewards, however, may be larger than you think."

Winchester was silent. It was a tempting proposition. Though Lohan had not troubled to conceal the hand of steel beneath the offered glove, his words had been vague and non-committal. He had not asked him to be a traitor to his own; only to cease resisting the lords and their minions.

"I'll try," said Winchester finally. "I'll try anything once."

"Good," said Lohan. He turned abruptly and stalked away.

Winchester stooped to pick up the discarded helmet and cloak. But the ring of soldiers in the distance closed in with angry shouts.

"Drop them!" screamed an officer, running up with drawn flame-gun.

He bathed the objects in dazzling fire. The fabric went up in a single puff; the metal parts spewed green fire and subsided into shapeless blobs of blue scale.

"Know, slave," said the officer loftily, "that what has touched Her Highness is never suffered to be employed in less honorable work. It is due only to the extraordinary grace and clemency of his Excellency that you escape the same treatment. Go."

Winchester surveyed him coolly from head to foot.

"Why, you pompous little monkey!" he said, and spat with pointed emphasis.

With great deliberation he picked up the small ax, which of all the equipment he had brought to the scene was the only remaining bit. Then he walked away, leaving the dumbfounded guard officer blinking.

As he passed the motorcar, he tossed the ax upon it, and went on by. He expected a roar of protest and a demand for explanations from the knot of refrigeration men gathered about, but they backed away and said nothing. When he reached his own place of operations, he observed the same phenomenon.

The convicts averted their faces and pretended not to see him, while the guards looked at him with expressions akin to awe. All were uneasy and uncertain what to do.

"Well?" growled Winchester, slightly disconcerted himself. There was something uncanny about the abrupt change of attitude.

"We did not know, O Excellency," cried the head guard, breaking down and falling to his knees. "We watched from afar, not daring to go to help unless called—"

"Bosh!" snorted Winchester. "So now you think I'm a little tin god!"

He leaped to the deck of the moss-laden flat-car, anxious to hide his inner turmoil.

"Okay, men, bear a hand. Hoist me again and send up a basket of moss. We've lost a good hour with this disturbance."

Mouths gaping, the guards stood about like dummies.

The gang rode home that night in stolid silence. Winchester took his usual place in line and went through the routine of being counted. At last the mustered convicts shuffled on, eager for the comparative liberty of the vast arena, where there was at least the illusion of privacy. Winchester shuffled along with them. No one had told him otherwise. Lohan's machinery would move in due time and in its own way.

It moved sooner than he expected.

A guard plucked him by the sleeve. Winchester stepped out of line.

"This way, you," said the guard, and pushed him along a wing passage.

They went down it until it turned into another. At that corner Winchester noticed the stonework had been nicked where a fiery blast had cut through. Below the splintery face of the stone, hardened slag hung.

Winchester recognized the spot and smiled ironically to himself. The last time he had traversed this passage, a guard had fired that bolt at him—and missed! Was it an omen?

They stopped before a bronze door. The guard flashed something held in the palm of his hand against an invisible watchman. Somewhere there was a click, and the door began to swing inward slowly.

"In there, you!" and the guard gave his prisoner a vicious shove.

CHAPTER XI

Universe in a Thimble

THE man seated behind the desk might easily have been taken for an American businessman of the Twentieth Century, except that he wore a gold-edged toga of deep green.

Winchester checked the headlong plunge imparted to him by his guide's farewell push, and managed to keep from sprawling across the desk.

"Sit down, won't you?" said the man pleasantly, as the great bronze door clicked shut. "Sorry about the entrance, but that was staged for the benefit of the scanners at each end of the hall. We have to efface the unfortunate impression made this afternoon."

He glanced at a jeweled chronometer.

"By now all the witnesses to the incident have been executed, so we may expect no trouble hereafter on that score."

Winchester sat down limply, almost overcome by the horror of what he had just heard. That horror was heightened immeasurably by the cool indifference with which the words were uttered. *All the witnesses!*

"All who enter our service," the man went on smoothly, "must serve an apprenticeship. It is necessary at times to act a part. To do that effectively, you must first know the part, and what is expected of it. Upon how well you do it will depend the importance of your succeeding assignment."

"I need not tell you that great prudence and restraint is required of everyone. The penalties for failure in that respect are—well, uh—rather drastic."

He smiled at Winchester. Winchester's nails bit into his palms, and his jaw muscles were as iron, but he managed to relax them enough to mumble, "I understand."

The man in green picked up a thick folder and slid it across the desk-top toward his visitor.

"This is the dossier that will precede you to your next place of employment. So far as the chiefs there know, it is the complete picture of your life since birth. I need not remind you that it has nothing whatever to do with the real record we keep of you here."

Winchester picked up the mass of documents with numb fingers and sat looking blankly at the cover. There were a mass of code numbers and file

references which meant nothing to him; but his name was there.

"You will take this dossier into the next room and study it until you know it by heart, as you will never see it again. The pages on green paper are supposed to be confidential. That is, they are things which the authorities know about you which you presumably do not know about yourself. It is important that you read these, too, as it rounds out the character you will have to assume.

"You may throw away those food pellets you brought in with you. In the room you will find better food, and a place to sleep whenever you feel the need of rest. When you feel that you are quite ready to proceed to the next step, ring the call bell on the table."

The man in green smiled again, and bowed slightly in dismissal. He indicated which of the three inner doors lead to the room mentioned. Winchester got up awkwardly, hugging the false story of his life. He managed to get out of the room without stumbling, though everything he saw, he saw through a bloody haze.

He had felt anger before, but never the cold urge to kill that he had fought to suppress all through the interview. The AFPA chief, if that was what he was, inspired in him an almost overpowering hatred.

THE more Winchester read, the greater grew his astonishment at the system's diabolical cunning. How the basic data had been obtained, he could not guess, unless it had been taken from him during one of his

periods of semi-consciousness during torture. But there were his fingerprints, a multitude of photographs from every angle, the arterial and venous designs on his eyeballs, his blood type, and a myriad of other unfakable details.

His parentage—individual numbers given—was recorded in full, as was the mythical place of his birth. In an attached appendix were photographs of his imaginary father and mother, other relatives, the street map of his home village and photographs of it in summer and winter.

In the appendix also was an account of his early apprenticeship to the trade of gardener, and full information as to what the garden contained, as well as a treatise on what he was supposed to know about horticulture.

On, on the voluminous book went. He had been stationed in Mars, it appeared, at a much later date, and there achieved distinction as a botanical expert. In fact, he had a letter from the director of the Martian Experimental Farm praising his work highly. He had been elevated to the rank of Scientist, third grade, and later promoted to first.

That rank, a parenthetical note informed Winchester, had really been awarded to his false personality to allow him to evade the rules concerning kow-tow. First class scientists had to kow-tow only to the wearers of the yellow.

He came to the end of his life-story with something akin to admiration. It was grim, and grudgingly given, but he could not deny they had over-

[Turn page]

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looked nothing. Indeed, it frightened him. If they saw his character so clearly part of the way, what was to prevent them from seeing it *all* the way?

Could he deceive his employers as well as those about him?

Winchester learned that he was to go to the great Interplanetary Natural History Museum, a place where living plants and animals of the planets, satellites and asteroids were kept. He was to be the Vice-Curator—one of many—but expected to know little except the plant life of Mars.

Actually, he was to be under instruction for some special work, to be assigned later by the Inner Council of Controlling Scientists. What that body was, he was not told.

But when he came to the envelope marked "Secret Instructions," he was startled at their brevity, so in contrast with the elaborate preparations of his personality. There was but a single sentence.

Be alert to discover disloyal subjects; report daily.

He slammed the folder shut. It was a thing that would require much study. It had required many hours to read through it once, and he marveled that it could have been compiled in so short a time. The only explanation could be that they had many such dossiers, prepared in blank, needing only to be filled out to fit what particular operative came along. It was a thing he would think of at another time. Immediately, he needed rest.

WINCHESTER reported to his chief at last that he was ready. He wore the maroon robe a guard had brought him. It was the symbol of his rank and branch of work.

The man in green looked up at him as if it had been less than an hour since he stepped out of the room. Actually, it had been a full week, Earth time.

"You will leave by a secret subway to Grand Central, and there you will be mixed with the incoming passengers from a Moon-Mars express coming in shortly. Your baggage is on

board. Flunkies from the museum will meet you and take you to your destination.

"It is arranged that you will be assigned laboratory H-three in the Botanical Building. In one corner of it is a writing desk, and beside it a small incinerator. Each night you will sit there and write your report of the day.

"Head each sheet Eight-RYF, sign each sheet Three-eleven-RYF. The latter is your personal number. Upon completing a sheet, feed it at once to the incinerator, and begin the next. When your report is finished, operate the small mill at the base of the incinerator.

"That will reduce the paper ashes to powder. Dissolve the powder in the liquid marked 'K', which you will find at hand. Pour the solution down the drain. Is that clear?"

"Yes."

"Very well."

The chief tapped a bell. A special guard appeared.

"Mars — incoming — twenty-two: thirty-four today. Take him away."

Winchester followed the guard through an intricate maze of secret panels and hatches. They eventually came to a tunnel of small bore, which had rails laid at one hundred and twenty-degree intervals about its perimeter. The guard pressed a spot in the wall, and in a moment a small car slid to a stop before them. They got in.

A reverse process brought them to the end of a blind passage. The guard put his eye to a small lens set in the wall.

"The Martian passengers have just disembarked," he said in a low voice. "As soon as the last of them has passed, step out and follow them. People will meet you below."

There was a nudge, and the false wall slid sideward. Winchester eased himself through the slit afforded and found himself on a steep ramp. He could hear the tramp of feet below, as of a considerable crowd going down. He turned at once and descended after them.

At the bottom of the ramp he saw other passengers being greeted. He noted their behavior and looked about

him. He had not been told how he was to recognize the museum flunkies. Then he observed three slaves in the domestic gray, but with maroon hems on their kilts. They were on their chests and knees, bumping their faces on the pavement toward him. He strode over to them.

"Arise, slaves, and do your duty."

It hurt him to use the words, but that was the formula used by those who had preceded him, and he thought best not to depart from it. The three servants rose, and two disappeared into the crowd. Winchester supposed they were going after his baggage.

"This way, master," the third said.

The passage to the museum was made in a small rocket-car, operated by technicians. They did not perform the kow-tow, but bowed deeply as Winchester appeared.

"There it is, Worthy," said the pilot, causing the machine to hover over a huge crystal dome on the anti-Earth side.

The "Worthy" came as a little shock, too, though the book had told Winchester scientists of rank rated it.

"The big dome covers all," the pilot explained. "Beneath are many small craters, each with its own dome. One for Venus, one for Mars, and so on. It's the universe in a thimble, as we call it."

"Thanks," said Winchester, looking down.

Suddenly he felt oppressed by the magnitude of the task he had undertaken. He knew so little. There was so much to do. And danger lurked everywhere. He had already seen how one impulsive, unconsidered act had cost the lives of dozens. What was ahead?

"Land, please," he ordered. "I am anxious to see it."

thimble was a sizable one—fifty miles across and several deep.

Colorful villas nestled at the foot of the cliffs among groves of terrestrial trees, while a grassy plain, crisscrossed with roads, formed the crater bottom. A score or more of lesser cones stuck their heads up into the Earthly atmosphere, but it could be seen that they were covered with domes of their own and had entrance portals cut into their flanks.

Despite the genial artificial climate of the museum as a whole, some of the small craters were perpetually covered with frost and patches of ice, indicating they were severely refrigerated within. Those were the ones holding the exhibits from dim Uranus and Neptune.

A staff car took Winchester to a long low building near the Crater of Venus. There he presented his passport, his orders and other credentials to a gimlet-eyed police official. After answering a few perfunctory questions, he was sent into an adjoining office to meet his new superior, the Curator-in-Chief. He was a sad-visaged, weary-looking man of about sixty, and very gaunt.

"Your work," he said, "will be adapting other planet life-forms to Earthly conditions. Some can be made to live, some not. It is a matter of chemistry and temperature, largely—sometimes glands. You will learn about this as you go along. You will be quartered in the Botanical Section, where they will tell you more."

The chief dismissed Winchester with a nod of his head.

The suite to which the American was assigned was H-3, as had been foretold him. It contained not only a small, well-equipped laboratory, but living rooms. The comfort and seeming privacy of the apartment astonished Winchester, for his experience until then had been that all of the conquered race were treated like dogs. He was to learn in the next few days that there were many exceptions, particularly among the scientist class.

Presently the instructor to whom Winchester was assigned took him to a large greenhouse, situated just outside one of the smaller craters.

CHAPTER XII

New Beginnings

THE establishment beneath the iridescent dome was amazing indeed. It was, as the pilot had said, a universe in a thimble, though the

"Take it easy in here," he was advised. "The air is thin, and contains much less oxygen than you are used to. We are trying to wean some Ionian Harps for transplantation to the Khan's villa in America."

The instructor led the way to a row of purplish plants that resembled kettledrums. As they appeared, Winchester observed that they gave off a sweet, doleful, humming sound through the vibration of a number of tightly stretched fibers just above the drumhead. He thought he could detect a definite tune and rhythm in the quaint music, but he was so distracted by the swarm of insects that kept annoying him that he could not be certain.

"This is an amusing plant," explained the tutor. "It grows wild on Io. You see, it has a resonant diaphragm over which is a natural harp. Each string of the harp has its own pitch. Furthermore, each string exudes a perfume of its own, different from that of any other string."

"The perfumes attract these insects flying about, and they dash themselves against the fibers, causing them to vibrate, producing music. That, in turn, attracts small birds, which are caught and eaten by the plant."

"Neat, but elaborate," commented Winchester dryly.

SHORTLY afterward they climbed into a lunabile and struck out along one of the roads. A few minutes later they heard a series of dull booms ahead, as if blasting was in progress. They came to a stretch of road shielded on one side by metallic plates, in which observation slits had been cut every few hundred feet. The bombardment on the other side continued intermittently.

"Floribombs," explained the tutor tersely, in response to Winchester's inquiring look.

He pulled the scooter to the side of the road near a peeping slot and got out. Winchester cautiously put an eye to the hole. A field of liverish-colored soil stretched out before him, dotted here and there with bushes. As he looked, a clump of them blew up with a boom that shook the ground.

When the dust cleared away, there were only ragged holes where the plants had been.

"That is a Mercurian plant—in a double sense," said the tutor. "It comes from Mercury, and it feeds on mercury, as well as nitrogen and water. Now is its seeding time. The soil you see is a mixture of cinnabar, ordinary earth and some selected nitrate fertilizers. The plant synthesizes some of these elements into fulminate of mercury, which gathers in its seed pods just as the seeds begin to ripen."

"When the accumulation is complete, the least jar will set it off, throwing the seeds for hundreds of yards around. A faint breeze is all that is needed, which makes the plants rather dangerous to have around. We hope to put them to industrial use, but so far no one has worked out a safe way to harvest them."

The instructor stopped talking as another of the plants disintegrated, then went back to the lunabile.

"They appropriate twenty Grade-P slaves a year for experimental use," he added glumly. "But so far, it has resulted only in simple massacres. I am glad they took me off that work." He coughed. "The Khan is great and wise."

"He is the All-Highest," murmured Winchester, shuddering.

They came to a turn in the road, and were passing a group of the gray-clad slaves of the lower grades. Some of them already had on crude suits of armor, while others were still dressing. Armed guards stood over them, urging speed, lest all the plants blow up before they could get out onto the field.

The lunabile drew up before another laboratory building five miles beyond.

"You'll need a gas mask here," warned the tutor, producing a pair of them from a compartment in the car. "This is the Lotusol distillery."

It was not a large building. Winchester found himself in the receiving room. Here several masked slaves were feeding fat, lush leaves to a set of rolls which squeezed the juice out of them. This was drained off into pans and piped into the next room,

where there was a series of retorts set over low flames.

A single scientist watched the apparatus here. In the room beyond, glass piping of small bore carried the pale canary distillate to a machine that bottled it in small ampules. More slaves took the ampules away and packed them tenderly into cotton-padded cases.

"Essence of Lotus juice," amplified the tutor, as they emerged. "This distillery runs only now and then. We furnish the police with fifty cases a year. No one else is permitted to have it."

"Lotus juice?" queried Winchester. "I thought that was the stuff that made addicts for the Crater of Dreams. Why should they allow it to the police?"

"The police do not take it themselves. They use it to dope the year's selected artists with. It makes them more tractable. Few intellectuals go voluntarily, you know. They cure that by spraying them with an atomizer.

"After a whiff or so, they want nothing else. I saw it done once—to a designer of ballet dances."

He stared meaningly at Winchester.

"It was not nice to see," he added softly. "He was my brother."

That time the instructor did not append the stock phrase of glorification to the Khan.

"The practise of botany is not what it used to be," commented Winchester, by way of reply.

"No," snapped the tutor.

In his eyes was a peculiar light.

That night Winchester made out his daily report in the exact fashion directed by the AFPA chieftain at Central. In doing so he took great care to exhibit no curiosity concerning the spot where he wrote. He knew that 8-RYF or one of his minions must be watching him through a cleverly concealed television scanner.

But he was equally confident that if such was the case, it would be so well hidden that no effort of his would find it. He assumed, too, that they did not want him to find out the method of transmission, or they would

have told him about it before this.

He wrote sheet after sheet, steadily and without reserve. He put down the substance of the conversation he had had with his tutor. He characterized him as "not openly disloyal, but unenthusiastic." He was reluctant to do that, but he had a shrewd idea he was being tested. It was not unlikely that the tutor was also submitting a report.

Similarly, ten days later, after attending a clandestine meeting of six self-styled rebels—"freemen" all, loaned as assistant gardeners from the labor gangs of Cosmopolis—Winchester reported all that was said. They wanted, the gardeners told him, a certain vegetable oil derived from the flowers of the *toxicidal*, a deadly poisonous vine of Ceres.

They had a fellow conspirator who was an assistant cook in the police barracks at Cosmopolis, and who promised to mix it in the food.

Winchester never knew what followed, as the working party finished its job and was withdrawn a few days later, but he had the feeling he had done no innocent man wrong. His invitation to the meeting, while furtively offered, was too bold. Genuine rebels would not have been so frank with an untested stranger.

CHAPTER XIII

Crater of Dreams

WINCHESTER'S testing period stretched into months, and still no word came from the mysterious man in green in the citadel. The American continued to work at whatever tasks were assigned, and learned many startling facts about the weird creatures of other worlds. Not only did he work with plants, but on several occasions assisted in the Zoological Division, and there he had to deal with queer animals.

One of his jobs was to discover a substitute diet for the terrible Venusian sea-tigret, which dwelled on the cliffs above the artificial lakes in the Venus Crater. It was a mammal much

on the lines of a seal, but spotted like a leopard and possessing the powerful teeth of a cat, as well as claws at the tips of its flippers.

Its habit was to lie in waiting along the brow of the cliff, then pounce on the prey it could spot in the clear waters beneath. The sea-tigret was fierce and voracious, and the curators found it impossible to keep the lake stocked with suitable fish.

Another troublesome animal was the *Ursa Saturnis*, or the great bear of Saturn. It was a huge, rotund beast, covered with silky white feathers, on which a scarlet spiral stripe wound like the markings of a barber pole. It did not prey on large animals, but on tiny ones that lived in the crevices of rocks.

That problem Winchester helped solve by suggesting a thick glove that could be locked on, since the beast's claws grew so rapidly that clipping did no good.

Besides these activities and his occasional espionage work, Winchester found time for some research work in his little private laboratory. Some of its results he reported, some he kept to himself. Among the latter was a stimulant so powerful, he dreaded to think how it might be misused by wrong hands.

He found it by accident, seeking the ingredient which made the flittleberry wine of Ganymede so heady. By means of successive distillations, he found a fraction which he called *ergogen*, on account of the tremendous flood of energy it released in the human body.

It acted much as adrenalin does, only more promptly and with more pronounced results. It was small wonder that a man drunk on flittleberry wine was willing to fight his weight in wildcats.

Another subject of unflinching interest was the super-narcotic Lotusol. Winchester analyzed the oil carefully and read all the existing pamphlets on the symptoms arising from its use. In general, he found, it was similar to the opium of his own day. But it went far beyond opium in two ways. A few deep whiffs formed the habit, and the habit was incurable.

Winchester worked many weary hours of overtime on that fascinating drug, memorizing his results and committing nothing to paper, except some proposals for minor improvements in the method of the oil's distillation. A little later, he abstracted some books on medicine and physiology, which he found in a locked case at headquarters, and studied them intensively.

Bit by bit he added to his store of scientific knowledge. He was thankful to the Mongoloid rulers that their bookburning had been confined to such fields as history and philosophy.

As he was about to conclude his study of Lotusol and its effects, an event happened to round out and complete his data. The alarm gongs sounded and the scientists at the station were informed that a casualty had just occurred in the Lotusol distillation plant. Winchester happened to be in the office of the Curator-in-Chief at the time, and hopped into his lunabile with him.

They found the young scientist in charge in the bottling room, but a single glance was all that was necessary to know that no information could be had from him. For he was groveling ecstatically on the floor, sniffing deliriously at a broken ampule. His helmet had been discarded and lay at one side, showing a ragged tear in the fabric about the neck.

"What happened?" demanded the chief of the cowering slaves.

"There was a big crash—a retort, I think. Then he came in here, tore off his helmet, and grabbed an ampule and broke it. That's the fourth one."

THE chief curator plugged his helmet jack into the nearest wall outlet. It connected him with the televisor control.

"Get me Welfare," he ordered. He turned to Winchester. "He's done, poor fellow. The still blew up and cut his suit. I'll see what I can do—"

"Yes?" rasped a voice.

The screen over the plug flickered and became light, showing a Mongoloid face.

"Scientist Frobheim, second class, stricken by Lotusol — line of duty. What is the disposition?"

"Wait," said the voice, and the face faded. It reappeared after a minute's delay. "Frobheim—record clean. Approved for Crater of Dreams as reward for faithful service."

"Helmited?" queried the Chief.

"Hm-m, let's see. Intelligence Quotient only one hundred eight. Nope. Not interesting. No helmet. Get him over. We'll get out the bulletins right away."

The chief curator yanked out his plug.

"There you are," he said, with an air of great satisfaction. "If you do the right thing, you will be treated right. If he had been surly and non-cooperative, or a mere slave, we would have had to deprive him of the drug. Then he would die. As it is, we are allowed to take him over to the crater and let him loose inside. After that he will be happy."

"May I take him there? I would like to see that place," ventured Winchester.

"Why, yes," said the chief, in mild surprise. "But be sure to wear a good strong suit and take a few guards with you. Some of the inmates there are apt to be violent at times."

By then the rocket-car was reported to be ready at the outer portal. Winchester set out with two guards, both outfitted like himself, and their prisoner-patient, who sat slumped in the back seat, happily inhaling the potent drug. At the portal, the gate guard handed them their written authorization to proceed, which had come through in the meantime by telescription.

The Crater of Dreams looked much like any other crater on the Moon as one approached from the outside. There was the same rugged incline, topped by cliffs which somewhere were cut to permit the installation of an airlock, which introduced the visitor to the tunnel that led to the inner bowl. The party left the ship parked outside and showed their pass to the airlock guard.

"An hour, no more," he growled, pocketing the paper.

They stepped into the lock, which in a moment filled with steam. Under the hot moisture the stiff fabric of

their space-suits softened and sagged, until it clung to their bodies like wet silk. They seated themselves on a small hand-car and made off through the tunnel, until they came to the open lock on the inner side.

They emerged into raw, dripping, primeval jungle. Wisps of fog drifted through and clung to the dank vegetation. Underfoot was soft mud that yielded to the slightest pressure, yet held on to the foot like quicksand. Brilliant plumaged birds flitted and squawked overhead, and every minute or so scalding drops of rain would come down in sudden showers that ceased almost as abruptly as they began. Here was a replica of Venus, faithful to the utmost detail.

A few paces farther on and Winchester and his party came to the first of the Lotus growths. They stood in thick clumps, each fat leaf growing out from the one beneath it, resembling in form the spineless cactus of Texas.

The flowers were tall, lily-like blooms, and the fruit a sort of melon. The first clump the group came to was untouched, but the one beyond showed signs of having been stripped recently of all its fruit and many leaves.

A little further they came to a clearing. Sand had been dumped here, and a number of marble slabs provided. Sprawled on the sand or reclining on the slabs lay a number of men. Most of them wore metal helmets that left their faces bare. At a sign from Winchester, the guards released their prisoner and stood back to see what he would do.

He sprang to the nearest Lotus plant and broke off a cluster of leaves. Then he sat down on the sand and began to eat them avidly. A few seconds later, he dropped the half-eaten leaves and flopped over on his back, wearing a look of utter contentment.

WINCHESTER studied the faces of the stupefied men at his feet. All seemed at peace, and their expressions ranged from the blissful to the ecstatic. Few made any motion other than an occasional twitch or a change in facial expression. All

seemed to breathe easily, to be full-fleshed and well. It was a life free from need or worry.

Winchester remembered he had work to do, and the time was short. From his pocket he withdrew a stethoscope and listened briefly to the hearts and lungs of the sleepers about him. Then he pulled out a set of slides and a needle, with which he drew a number of small blood samples. For half an hour he examined the men of the Crater as elaborately as his equipment and his borrowed knowledge would permit. Then he signified he was ready to go. The time was nearly up.

That night the American's report to 8-RYF said merely that he had made the trip to the Crater and delivered a new inmate to it. He added that he had made a superficial examination of a few of the sleepers there, and found them to be in good shape. He reported in some detail the conditions of the plants and the climate, and recommended—from a botanist's point of view—that the mean temperature be cut down about four degrees. He had noticed several spots of wet-rust on a tree.

He did not mention the blood tests.

CHAPTER XIV

A Man and a Drug

IT'S time for a showdown, brother," said Dominguez, rising from his seat and leaning on the table.

His knuckles showed white under the pressure as he put his weight on them.

"You've talked regular. So far as we know, you've been regular. But now that the zero hour is near, we've got to know if you are regular. None of our gang has been missing lately, but you claim to be an ex-convict. Things being what they are, we'd like to have proof of it."

Winchester eyed him back. It had taken him six weeks to get the confidence of this gang. He couldn't weaken now.

"I can prove that in just five seconds," he said steadily. "But since you are getting tough about things, there is one thing I want to know. After the revolution, what do we get out of it?"

Dominguez laughed, and it was a hard laugh.

"What do you think, you poor sap? We slap down the slant-eyes. Then we move into their palaces. What could be sweeter? The rest of these goofs will yelp a little, then take it. They're used to it; they don't know anything else. But what we want to know is—who are you?"

Winchester stared back at him a moment, then slowly rose. He stripped off the foreman's jacket he had been wearing, and after that he yanked away the undershirt. Then he turned his back and showed it to them. The seven arch-conspirators stared, and several gasped.

"Yes," lied Winchester, turning about with great deliberation. "I'm a red-star convict—the only one I ever knew of escaping. It took me five years to build up to where I am now, and you ask me who I am! Well, if I'm not with you, nobody is. These sheep in Cosmopolis think they have grievances. Believe me, brothers, I know I have! The worst you can think of is mild to what I would like to do to those flat-faced—"

"Good enough," said Dominguez, slapping his hand on the table. "No man would or could forge that mark on himself. But who was your right-hand buddy there?"

"A guy named Heim," said Winchester with assurance.

He had suspected many, if not most of his recent associates of being stool pigeons, but not Heim. Heim rang true.

"Okay, pal. From now on we don't pull punches. Here's the dope."

For half an hour Dominguez poured forth the details of the revolution to be. It was set for Lunar dawn—just forty hours to come. There was ample time to station all the details and arrange every item. The plants of Cosmopolis were to be taken over by the current shift, with the concurrent massacre of the guards.

Other disgruntled elements on the Moon were to be notified, so that they could synchronize their uprising with that of the inner group in the big city. After that they need only boycott the Earth. The slant-eyes would soon come to terms for lack of the necessities of life.

"Hold on," suggested Winchester. "Haven't you overlooked a bet? What about the Khan's personal army and his flotilla of space cruisers that he keeps close to him at his palace? And don't forget that in the old days, Terra supported a population of five billion. If the Khan plowed his lawns under and reopened his mines, he would have more resources than all the rest of the System put together.

"Pooh!" replied Dominguez. "With slaves? Forget it, pal. Once we take Cosmopolis, the whole System will fold up like an accordion."

"Then?" asked Winchester.

"Then we take over. We divvy up. Hugo here gets Africa. Donyi, South Asia. You get South America and I get North. Giuseppe takes what he wants of Australia, and—"

"All right," agreed Winchester. "Let's go. My job is to turn out the steelworkers. I meet you here after we have cleaned out our own crater. Is that right?"

Dominguez nodded, and Winchester slipped out into the dark.

FOR the fourth time Winchester rode in the secret subway beneath the Citadel. The first had been when he left 8-RYF's office for the Botanical Gardens. The second had been two months before, when he obeyed a mysterious summons to appear in person before his chief; the third when he left for Cosmopolis. That time he had changed personality again, and was dressed as a foreman of the steel-fabricating trade. Now he was back with a report to make.

He made the required signals before the secret panel and waited for the faint click that was to come.

Number eight did not look up when he first came in, but continued to study a sheaf of flimsies in his hand. When he did look up, it was with a cold scowl.

"When I gave you the means of reaching me here, I did not mean for you to abuse it," he said icily. "You should make your reports in the usual way, except in emergencies."

"There is an emergency," said Winchester quietly. "The gang you sent me to investigate have completed their plans and are about to strike. The word is being passed now. In thirty hours the massacre will commence."

"Strange," said Number Eight thoughtfully. He pressed a button, and when the answering buzz came he barked, "When did Fifty-eight report last?"

The answer was prompt.

"Yesterday. Says final meeting to be held tonight. Nothing since—"

Number Eight snapped the switch off, pressed another button.

"Cosmo-one? Trace this number at once." He gave it out.

"Got him right here," came back the answer, clear as a bell.

Winchester felt a small muscle in his neck twitch. He had seen the number before, and it was an easy one to memorize. It was the number worn by Donyi Dangar, timekeeper at the big smelter, one of the arch-conspirators!

But Cosmo-one had more to say.

"He was picked up ten minutes ago in Astarte Road. Throat slit from ear to ear and a dagger stuck in his back—"

"Okay," snapped 8-RYF. "Stand by for secret general alarm. It will be going out in about two seconds."

"Talk fast," said Number Eight to Winchester.

The chief began playing on buttons, and small pilot lights of many colors blinked on the board across the room.

Winchester told his story. It was the account of tonight's meeting, and the detailed plans for the insurrection. When it was over, Number Eight looked inquiringly past Winchester, who realized for the first time that while he had been talking, someone had come in behind him unheard.

"That's right," confirmed the unseen person.

Winchester knew the voice. It was

that of Lorenz, chief of the pattern-makers, another member of the conspirators!

"You've got it all," snapped Number Eight into his transmitter. "Round up those men. Execute them the slow way. No trials, but learn the names of the next men under them in each industry. Send them to Central. Thirty lashes and a warning to any small fry you catch. Got it? Acknowledge!"

The colored lights blinked, one after another, and went out, as each local police captain signified he had heard and understood.

"Good work," said Number Eight to Winchester. "You have proved yourself not only trustworthy, but capable. I had several other men cover the job too, so I know. Now you had better get back to your laboratory and stay out of sight for a few weeks, until we have cleaned up in Cosmopolis. Stand by for a new detail at the end of that time."

"Yes, sir," said Winchester, his heart pumping with excitement, and headed for the secret door.

BACK in laboratory H-3 he lay in his bunk and stared upward into the darkness, thinking over all he had seen and done.

The entire incident shook his self-confidence to the foundations. He had hoped by turning spy to be able to learn who and where the real revolutionaries were, then to shield them by turning in false reports. Later, when all was ripe, he would throw off the mask and join them.

But if he was checked up in every single act and utterance, as he had been so far, he could accomplish nothing. He would either have to become a better AFPA man to save his own skin, or else court almost certain exposure and the death by torture that would follow on its heels.

He could not sleep. He got up after a time and turned on the lights. Restlessly he paced his sleeping compartment, then enlarged his beat to include the tiny laboratory. He tried to quit thinking of that hidden room in the heart of Central, and the cold-eyed man who sat there and calmly

ordered numberless deaths and floggings.

He turned his thoughts rather to the weird vegetation in the craters about him, and the potent juices that ran through these plants. He had come to this place as an actor. Now that he was about to leave it for all time, he realized it would be as a genuine scientist and not as a faker.

The American thought suddenly of the experiments he had begun and never quite finished. Perhaps it would soothe his mind and give him a better perspective if he occupied himself with them once more. So, as he paced the floor, he retraced his findings, step by step, until he had freshened his memory. He stopped in his tracks, hit by an uninvited and unexpected thought. He frowned for an instant, then strode to the chemical cabinet.

Winchester took down a small vial of silvery oil, and a half-dozen standard solvents. He tried each until he found the combinations that would mix with the oil and not emulsify. He then jabbed his arm for blood, and experimented with it in combination with the Crater specimens. Last but not least, he brought forth from their hiding place a handful of little ampules—each containing a few C. C.'s of the insidious Lotusol. He put on a gas mask and strapped it tight.

At the end of an hour, five beakers stood on the table before him. The first was filled with a milky-white mess of curds; the second a thin, watery substance of bluish tinge, in which liverish hunks of matter floated.

The third and fourth showed chalky precipitates. It was only the fifth which came out clear. This had a deep rose color and a slightly oily texture. Winchester looked at them all, then carefully dumped them down the drain.

He turned on the air blower and let it run. Meantime he mixed up a fresh solution. That he poured into a container and hung it high on the wall. A small flexible tube with a valve led down from it. At the end of the tube was a sharp, hollow needle.

Winchester unstrapped his gas

mask and stopped the blower. Once more the air was pure. He lay down on the table and bared his left arm. He reached with his right hand and grasped the dangling needle. It took but one swift jab, accurately placed, to insert it in a vein. Then he turned the small valve and let the solution flow.

He lay back on the table and reached for one more item. It was a small ampule filled with a pale, canary-colored liquid. He snapped its neck with a firm twist of the fingers. His nostrils were assailed with a sickly-sweet odor. He gasped violently, and thought he was going to die. For a long moment it seemed that a clamp was snapped upon his throat, choking, choking, choking.

THEN came blissful relief. Golden vapors, gloriously illuminated, seemed to fill the room. As from far off mountain heights, the blended voices of untold multitudes of singing angels filled the ears with soothing melodies.

Pleasant odors crowded in, mingling into strange, fleeting combinations that succeeded one another in delightful variety.

A gratifying tingling suffused the skin. Winchester's mouth seemed to fill with the fragrant juices of exotic fruits.

He seemed to be aware of tender lips caressing his. All was well with the American. His lungs drew in breath after breath of the delicious Lotus vapor. He relaxed and let the kaleidoscope of dreams unfold itself in endless and always wonderful panorama.

The scene shifted. Cynthia appeared to him, laughing gaily. He gathered her into his arms, soothed her for the hardships she had had to endure in trying to save him from the gendarmes of Munich.

That vision faded, too, to be replaced by a fantasy of victorious conquest. Winchester experienced the lust of battle to its fullest, the tremendous satisfaction of seeing a wicked enemy humbled, beaten, in the dust.

And after that came more.

CHAPTER XV

A Vision

ALLAN WINCHESTER saw things with uncanny clarity. Never, in life, had every doubt and misgiving been swept away to be replaced by the clear, unchallengeable, lucid truth. But now it was so. All was revealed.

He saw himself the ruler of a mighty race, a race that governed not one planet but a hundred. He did not sit on a gilded throne, surrounded by sycophants and cringing servitors, but in a cool, quiet study, lined with books. Its windows gave out onto a sun-specked terrace and a park, beyond whose trees he could glimpse the spires of the perfect city.

He ruled, yet he did not rule; for the laws were so just that they were never questioned or infringed. His people were contented; well-housed, well-fed and healthy. Each did, for the good of all, what he could; each received, according to his nature, his proper needs.

Industry, art and science were welded into one harmonious whole, vigorous and flourishing, not for its own purposes, but for the better service of mankind. There was no waste, there was no shortage. The workers were happy. They were following the bent shown early in their childhood.

Work that delighted the hand and eye was done by hand. Work that was distasteful was relegated to the machines.

Poverty, disease and crime were words which had dropped out of the vocabulary. Lies and mutual recriminations no longer were bandied. There was no need for them. They had gone the way of slander, envy, jealousy, gluttony, greed and the other major vices.

Winchester rolled over, blearily half conscious. His unthinking fingers groped for and found the half-drained ampule and crushed it. Again he inhaled the delicate aroma, and sank back into heavenly dreams.

For what seemed to be an eternity,

history unrolled before him as on a mighty scroll. He saw the great conquerors, and would-be conquerors, from the Hittites onward; the petty tyrants of business and the household; gangsters, feeding on blackmail, who once held cities in their clutches.

Last of all he saw those who aspired to rule by violence, but lacked the intelligence—the common criminals of the jails. He talked with the great philosophers, long dead—Plato, Aristotle, Maimonides, Spinoza. He talked with Friedrich Nietzsche, the German thinker, whose vision of a "superman" had so infected German thought.

He stirred uneasily. His dream was turning sour. Sleepily he reached for another ampule, but could not find it. He dropped back into unrestful slumber.

Other shades came to trouble him. He witnessed the execution of the martyrs—benevolent men, but lacking in the will to fight. He saw Galileo offer a boon to humanity, only to withdraw it after torture. In a later century he saw artists and scientists fleeing from Europe like rabbits from a forest fire, not knowing how to resist a tyrant who understood only brute force—

Winchester shuddered and opened his eyes. The jar above him was half empty. A warm, rosy liquid dribbled from his punctured arm and made a small pool on the floor. He felt a sudden impulse to rise and smash things.

He bounded to his feet. With one sweep of the arm he demolished the container above him, saw it crash into a thousand fragments. Then he plunged into his bedroom, eager for action—but for what end, he did not know. He knew only that he had the urge to come alive again and do things, great things.

THE sight of himself in the mirror halted him in his tracks. He stared at the wild-eyed, desperate-looking apparition before him for a long, unbelieving minute. His nostrils quivered, and he trembled with a blind fury he did not understand.

But in a moment reaction set in, and he staggered shakily to his bunk and fell across it. He suffered intensely for an hour or more, and then grew calm. He knew that what he craved was more Lotusol, but wisely he had stolen only a limited quantity. There was no more.

At length he slept.

For the next few days Winchester went quietly about his routine work, but there was never an hour that his brain was not seething. The dreams he had lived stayed with him, as clear and vivid as reality. He could not shake off the feeling that the devastating insight into human nature he had experienced was a revelation from some higher inner intellect. It was something that had to be digested and interpreted. Then he could apply it to his work.

His work! How to proceed? Brute force must be fought with brute force, of course. There was nothing else tyrants understood. But he must be ever on guard against the misuse of even the forces he himself employed. What if another Dominguez should appear to help him, only to set himself up as another Khan?

History was full of such instances—of men fighting upward from the ranks but forgetting their old comrades once they attained power. Charlemagne and Peter the Great built empires, but under their successors the empires degenerated into tyrannies.

No, he must use weapons to overthrow the Mongoloids. But once the fight was won, the ultimate control must be turned over to the wise and kind, and the weapons destroyed.

Winchester thought over all the men he had met in this new world. They fell roughly into two classes—the forceful and aggressive, and the industrious and retiring. The rulers, their police, the Dominguezes and a number of the industrial supervisors were among the first. The artists, scientists and engineers were among the second.

The first group was grasping and ambitious, the second productive. The latter sustained and supported the former, who rewarded them by ever

demanding more. Yet they had only the choice of submission or extermination.

The furrow in Winchester's brow deepened. It began to look as if the only men who could defeat the men in power were men much like them. But his mind wandered farther down the social scale. Below the intellectuals were the lower classes—the laborers, the slaves and the criminals. Two generations of oppression had made them docile and useless—except the criminals.

"They have fight left in them," Winchester reflected. "Their greatest ambition is to escape a life of misery and live like human beings. When the revolt is over, the scientists and philosophers can take over.

"Not that I won't keep a judicious eye on them. Theory can be carried too far, too."

That night he wrote a strange request in his daily report.

"I request an audience with his Lordship, Prince Lohan, at the earliest possible date," he scribbled. "I

*The Ancient Brain Destroyers Battle to Use the Bodies of
Mankind for Their Own Alien Purposes*

IN

BLOOD ON THE SUN

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FEATURED IN THE NEXT ISSUE

"Ah, the criminals," Winchester thought. "'Criminals,' indeed! There is my tool."

He reflected on the old cynicism that there was no crime unless the misdeed was found out. But the "crimes" these men had committed were violations of a ruthlessly imposed criminal code. It was the code that was at fault, not its victims.

Of course, there would be exceptions. There always were. But the corps of "criminals," in the main, would prove reliable.

have a plan which will interest him greatly."

A little later he slowly stirred the dissolving ashes in the liquid that devoured them, and then listened to the gurgling as the evidence of his message disappeared down the drain. His face was a mask, for he did not know whether it could be seen by the scanner.

But inwardly he was exultant. At last he had a plan—a definite plan. It was daring and dangerous, even desperate, but there was a chance

that it would work. He must gain the full confidence of Prince Lohan. Once he had that, he might overthrow the empire, virtually alone and single-handed.

More than that, he could reorganize the lost Utopia afterward. It meant following a course of cunning ruthlessness for awhile, and the shedding of blood. But the prize was worth the cost.

That night he slept soundly. It was the first time since he had emerged from that clump of bushes growing upon the rubble that had been Munich.

It was a false assurance.

Winchester's message went unanswered, and he fretted. Time was passing, and the annual competitions were near. He did not know quite what that signified, but to him it meant danger to his Cynthia. Prince Lohan's cryptic remark had told him little, and that little he did not fully believe. She was well—but not too happy. Was she still in that school to which she had been sent, learning to sing and dance and practising the other antics that might render her pleasing in the eyes of men?

Or had she rebelled, as he had, and been sent to the female counterpart of his prison? It might well be the latter; for another hint Lohan had dropped was that her fate depended in the end on him. That suggested Cynthia was standing fast, cost what it might.

He ground his teeth and worked furiously on with his weird plant seedlings. The suspense was growing unbearable. It would be but an empty victory if he should overthrow the tyrants in the end, yet be too late to save Cynthia. He wanted her alive and happy and well.

Then one day the summons came, by a mysterious messenger, as before. This time Winchester was to proceed to a change of station, ostensibly to the Ellis Island of this world—the immigration and quarantine station on the Moon, where returning Jovian and Martian settlers had to undergo examination, and imported plants and animals be searched for alien spores and germs.

But Winchester was not to arrive there. Arrangements had been made—cleverly, as always—for him to disappear en route.

In due time he clicked the secret door, and once again he faced Number Eight.

"No answer means *no*," the chief said harshly. "One does not demand to see a prince of the Imperial blood, much less repeat the demand."

"It was a request, not a demand," said Winchester quietly.

"We won't quibble," said Number Eight shortly. "It was denied."

He studied Winchester a moment. "What was your proposition?" he asked, as if indifferent to the answer, so casual was the tone of the question. Winchester eyed him unswervingly.

"Plans designed for Imperial princes' ears," he said haughtily, "are not to be revealed to underlings—"

"It is the prince's own order," interrupted Number Eight icily.

"I will believe that when I hear it from his own lips," said Winchester, with a frigidity that matched his superior's.

The AFPA section chief sprang to his feet, his face livid. Winchester's heart exulted. His shot in the dark had hit home. For the man before him had never shown emotion before, and now he was trembling with it.

Winchester knew that Number Eight could witness his flaying without the turn of a hair—if it had been ordered by higher authority. He knew likewise that vituperation and epithets would rebound from the man's brassy hide as drops of rain from a duck's back.

Yet by the mere intimation that the man was lying, Winchester had hit him in the raw. The fellow was trying to put something over him!

NUMBER EIGHT glared at him for an instant. Then with a sudden impulsive gesture he smashed his palm against a nest of buttons on his desk. At once panels slid open and the room swarmed with guards.

"Ha!" snorted Winchester derisively, glancing at them. "So you're going to push your bluff further, eh? Did it ever occur to you, my dear

superior, that you are watched as closely as I? But go ahead. You have called your guards. Now what?"

Number Eight's eyes wandered uneasily from Winchester to the guards, then back to his desk. He was pale, and his hands shook.

"Return to your posts," he said weakly. "It was an error—my hand fell on the wrong buttons."

The guards saluted, and with inscrutable expressions wheeled and disappeared from the room as abruptly as they had entered. Winchester waited until the last secret door slid shut and the walls resumed their normal appearance of solid hewn stone. Then he folded his arms upon his breast and faced 8-RYF. There was a glint of satisfaction in his gaze, and the faintest suggestion of a smile on his straight-set lips.

"It's still your move," Winchester told him.

"Another test, that's all," said Number Eight nervously. "You stood it well. You understand, I hope, that I could not forward your request unless it was really important. Now that I am convinced, it will go forward without delay."

"Thanks," said Winchester, with grim irony. "Thank you so very much."

CHAPTER XVI

Mysterious Tryst

THE American was assigned sleeping quarters in a guardroom. He ate his supper in silence and was about to prepare for his bunk, when the sound of clicking heels and the jingle of accouterments as men sprang to attention caused him to pause and look toward the door.

A heavy-set man of forbidding appearance was striding toward him. He was dressed in the green of an AFPA official, but the profusion of gold emblems on his collar and sleeves told Winchester he was about to meet one of higher rank than he had heretofore seen.

To his astonishment, the officer

halted a few paces before him and bowed deeply.

"Pardon, Excellency. A grievous error has been made. Will you be good enough to accompany me?"

Winchester returned the bow, but said nothing. He started to gather up his belongings, but a soldier already had them. There was nothing to do but follow the official out of the room, walking between the ranks of prison guards who stood stiffly at attention.

They traversed a number of corridors and went upward some distance in a concealed elevator. The officer led the way into a sumptuous apartment and there bowed himself out.

"Prince Lohan has your message. In due time you will be given an audience."

Winchester examined his palatial suite with mingled awe and suspicion. His distrust of the police was profound, and he had been unable so far to fathom the motives of Lohan. He could only guess at what this latest move meant.

Obviously he had the protection of the prince, and that accounted for the deference of the police; but he was troubled over what might be the prince's motives. Gratitude might be one. But the sort of gratitude to be expected from princes is notorious, Winchester knew.

That alone would not explain. Nor Lohan's statement that his interest sprang from the fact his protege came from an ancient world. If his interest had been truly keen, he would have questioned Winchester long before.

Winchester bit his lip and frowned. He dismissed almost instantly the thought that perhaps he was valuable as a secret agent. That was ridiculous, for Lohan had thousands of them at his beck and call, any one of whom knew the game better and was more loyal. That left only Cynthia. She was in Lohan's custody and his interest in her was undisguised.

Was Winchester being kept alive and nursed along, so as to be used eventually as a weapon against the girl? Was the relatively good treatment being accorded him a sort of

bribe to induce her to yield? For he felt that she was true and loyal, and therefore might be bullied by threats against his safety.

Lohan was probably shrewd enough to realize that with Winchester dead, she would only turn defiant.

It troubled the American; but if it was so, at least it gave him time. And time was sorely needed. But until he knew more, he could only play his cards as they were dealt him.

The inspection of the rooms revealed a comfortable bedchamber, a luxurious sunken bath, a reception room and a small guardroom where a gold-braided sentry stood. Winchester said nothing to the man, but the fellow had the appearance more of a guard of honor than of a custodian. He went on with his exploration of the rooms.

A narrow bronze door let him into a darkened closet lit only by dim blue lights. He saw slits in the wall through which brighter light filtered. He put his eye to one, found he was looking down into the arena where the prisoners of the outside working parties were housed at nights. As before, they sat or slept on the sand in small groups.

Winchester found several observation slits fitted with telescopic sights, and several parabolic reflectors at the foci of which were microphones. He tried one of them. By pointing it correctly, he could pick up the slightest whisper on the floor. Using one in conjunction with a high-powered eyepiece, he swept the floor, seeking familiar faces.

At last he found Heim, squatting beside a fellow slave and talking softly with as little motion of the lips as possible, after the fashion of prisoners from time immemorial. The talk went on for minutes, mostly about the day's work and a particularly brutal guard they happened to have. Then it turned to a discussion of the latest addition to their ranks.

"Yeah," Heim was saying, "he looks okay, and that's too bad. The right guys never last long. I had a pal once—a fella named Winchester. Claimed to have slept a thousand

years and woke up here. He was a little screwy, I guess, but I liked him. They took him off on a construction job and that was the end of him. Something happened that didn't suit Slant-eyes, so the whole gang got the works. That's the way it goes—"

Winchester listened longer, but his name was not mentioned again. After a bit, he clicked off the observation machines and quietly went to bed, taking another problem with him.

Why had Lohan assigned him this room? As a demonstration of how the all-seeing eye works? Or as a mark of special confidence? There was no answer.

Hours later Winchester fell asleep. He dreamed of being in a tangled net, woven with devilish cleverness out of intertwined question marks.

Nothing made any sense now.

The morning brought another interview with Number Eight. But it was a different Number Eight. He was of the same general type, but slightly older.

"You will deal with me hereafter," he said in a dry, brittle voice. "My predecessor is unfortunately—uh—indisposed. He will not be back."

He cleared his throat. He did not look too happy over stepping into the vacated job.

"Pending your coming audience, there is an important job to be done. As soon as you have completed that, His Highness will see you. Until then you will make no report. He will receive the report in person. Here is the story."

The section chief drew a portfolio of reports toward him.

"Lunar Mines is a private concession operated by the Li-Kiang family—distant cousins of the Lohans. They have their own intelligence service, but we find it expedient to exercise some supervision ourselves. Five of our operatives are already there in minor capacities. They were sent ahead to lay the groundwork. They have already worked their way into positions of trust, and are ready to introduce you as an old friend and leader.

"You will at once take charge and unveil the whole conspiracy, of what-

ever nature it is, and then arrange for yourself a natural 'disappearance'. Under no circumstances are you to take direct action. Is that clear?"

"Yes, sir."

Winchester took the portfolio. He knew he was in for many hours of intensive study and nearly as many more in the hands of the make-up experts. Since the new Number Eight had no more to say, he withdrew to his elegant quarters.

He found, as in the two previous assignments, that the case had been carefully prepared to the tiniest detail. He would assume the character of a "freeman" foreman from the atomic fuel depot, and was supposed to be an authority on explosives. He was known to be a leader among the rebel groups, and had run away from Cosmopolis to avoid persecution by the Lohan AFPA.

Pang Li-Kiang's mine superintendent was suspected of acquiring much of his labor in that fashion, and of harboring fugitives. The Grand Duke Li-Kiang had made an investigation and had found no disloyalty, or so he said. Prince Lohan wanted the truth. Hence this expedition.

Winchester studied the papers until he understood. Then he dressed the part and went to a certain spot in Cosmopolis, where he was joined by one of the operatives. Later they went together to the mines.

GLEANING the information sought took surprisingly little time, thanks to the careful preliminary work. Winchester was immediately received into the rebel ranks and accorded top authority. In a few days he had met the superintendent, a Caucasian named Stallforth, a man with a bulldog face and an iron will, but kindly in manner.

He was an excellent mine chief, and the condition of the workers was rather better than elsewhere on the Moon, despite the grueling nature of their jobs. For a few days Winchester was puzzled that there should be so much plotting and unrest there, as compared to other places, until he became friends with Stallforth and got at the facts.

When he knew them and had verified them through his other contacts, he was ready to report.

He arranged an explosion to cover his supposed demise. A confederate brought him several fingers and a severed foot from the execution chambers at Central. He planted these in his room, together with a small bomb which he placed on his work table. He left all his clothing, and escaped in a basket carried by one of the lesser agents.

Two hours later his room blew up. The associates he had left behind promptly identified the remains. That particular role was done with forever.

"I am ready now," Winchester told Number Eight when he reported back at Central.

"Good. So is Prince Lohan. You will take the Four-forty to Terra, Alpine Port. That will be tomorrow. In the meantime you must prepare a fresh character."

Winchester raised his eyebrows.

"It is awkward for His Highness to meet commoners in private audience. Your meeting will be informal. You are going in the capacity of a horticultural expert, as adviser to the head gardener of the Khan. En route you will stop at the Lohan estate and inspect the gardens there. The prince will contrive to meet you."

"I see," said Winchester.

It was a relief to know there would be no witnesses, for should the prince by any chance lose face, it meant the death of all who observed it. Winchester had never felt entirely guiltless over the wholesale slaughter that had followed his last interview with the yellow-robed tyrant.

"I will be ready," he said.

But inside him, his heart beat wildly. Things were coming his way at last.

Once more Allan Winchester walked the wide lawns of what had formerly been Germany. He had a better picture of them now, for he had observed the continent of Europe carefully as his space ship descended.

There were no more fields and few towns. All had been turned back to forest or park, studded with the palaces and pavilions of the silk-wearers.

By special order of Prince Lohan, Winchester was to be allowed to wander about freely, and for the duration of his inspection the field-slaves were kept in barracks and their soldier guards with them.

It was a deserted paradise, except for the gay parties going on in some of the lodges and pavilions. Winchester saw them from a distance, and walked on. At his own convenience the prince would meet him.

At last Winchester caught a glimpse of yellow in the underbrush, saw the shimmer and sheen of embroidered silk. But it was not the wide-skirted robe worn by the prince, but pantalets rising above dainty sandaled feet. A graceful figure slipped from behind the bushes and beckoned to him.

The gesture was not coy, but imperious and urgent—almost frantic, denoting haste was in order. It startled him, for it was the last thing he expected to see on his trip to Earth. But he collected himself and strode toward the woman, wondering what complication he had blundered into and how he should handle it.

The moment the woman had made her sign, she hid in the bushes again. Winchester started. This was the oriental princess he had snatched from the creeping tentacles of the Martian pitcher-plant.

But what was more amazing, Cynthia—Cynthia, the girl of his dreams—was right beside her!

CHAPTER XVII

Two Interviews

IN another moment he and Cynthia were locked in each other's arms. He embraced her with all the ardor of intense longing. She clung to him passionately, desperately, whimpering like a frightened child that has at last found its protector.

"Oh, Allan," she whispered. "It has been so hard not to know. I thought you were dead—I could not believe them. And then when they convinced me—"

"How?" he asked.

"They let me look through a tele-scanner. It was the day you defied that horrid secret service man when he tried to intercept your message to the prince. I knew you were well, then, and more than well. For I had been so afraid they would break your spirit. I have seen so much of that here—men that cringe like whipped dogs at the sight of the tiniest bit of insignia."

"But you?" he demanded fiercely. "I can take care of myself. But you?"

"I can, too. Believe me, Allan. But it is like walking a tight-wire in a gale of wind. The prince loves me, you see. Only he is a proud man. He is strong enough to take me any time he chooses, but he will not have it that way.

"He has been courting me. He promises great things for you—if I will only give you up. That I will never do! But the time has not come when I have to tell him so. Oh, Allan, do something to end this horrible suspense! We can't go on this way."

She shuddered violently and he pressed her more tightly to him.

"I am doing something," he said, "but it will take time. Fight for time. It is the only thing that counts now. By the way—how did you arrange to be assigned to Prince Lohan's estate?"

He noticed now that she also wore the imperial yellow, though it was slashed with red. She looked over her shoulder to where the princess stood, a dozen yards away, looking on with approval but with some signs of apprehension.

"Chen Chin—that means Lustrous Pearl—chose me from the school to be her handmaiden. She was jealous of me then, and wanted me close so she could have me poisoned. It was just at that time that you saved her life. She learned more about us from the prince.

"Until she actually met you, she believed you to be a fictitious person, invented to deceive her. Now she is fighting for us, both out of gratitude to you and because she loves Prince Lohan and wants to hold him. She thinks that so long as you are alive—"

The princess uttered a little cry of

alarm, and made fluttering gestures. "It is time to go," whispered Cynthia. "We have taken great risks."

"Courage, sweet," said Winchester, crushing Cynthia in one last embrace. "Keep on believing in me, even if I do some strange things soon. It may take time, but if I succeed, not only will we be free but all humanity as well."

"I feel so helpless," the girl murmured. "What if Prince Lohan—"

Winchester felt within a secret pocket and drew forth a small object. He pressed it into her hand. It was an ampule of the canary-colored drug of dreams.

"Keep this hidden about you at all times. If Lohan presses you to the point of desperation, break it under his nose, but hold your own breath and run. Its fumes deal out a death-in-life, a gripping drug habit."

A sharp hiss came from the anxious princess. Their eyes blurred with tears. There was a tight squeeze of the hand. Before he knew it, Winchester was standing among silent bushes whose boughs stirred faintly in the wind. He waited a little bit and then walked on, pretending to examine the vegetation.

A DAY later he met Prince Lohan himself. He was strolling in the woods unattended. At the sight of Winchester he sat down on a knoll of grass and motioned to the American to come and sit beside him. His manner was impersonally expectant.

"Well?" he asked. "What is the situation at the Lunar Mines?"

Winchester pretended for a moment to have a reluctance that he did not feel. He was resolved to pull no punches, but here he was treading on dangerous ground.

"I am sorry to report, sir," he said, as if painfully picking his words, "that your noble kinsman is disloyal, and his entire establishment is with him."

"I know that," barked Lohan. "The details, please."

"He poses as a humane man, as bait to the workers. To bolster that pose, he feeds them a little better and allows them small liberties. It is a pol-

icy that has brought many of the better workers to his side. Slaves scheme to be sold to him. He has allowed it to leak downward to the multitude that when he becomes the Khan—"

"He will never become Khan," snapped Lohan.

"—he will abolish slavery and institute reforms. His man Stallforth is particularly dangerous because he is able, sincere and a courageous fighter. The rank and file are all steamed up. They plan to contaminate the other workers and eventually seize control of the Moon. The accession of Prince Li-Kiang would follow as a matter of course."

"Excellent!" exclaimed Lohan. "You put the thing in a nutshell. It is a true report and a concise one. I knew all of it long ago. I wanted confirmation from an enemy."

"An enemy, my lord?" asked Winchester.

"Aren't you?" countered Lohan. "And why not?"

"I am not a fool, like these others. In this world, the strong get what they want, and therefore I intend to be strong. And to be still stronger, I intend to ally myself with the strong. It is no more than common sense."

"Well spoken. Now, what are your recommendations as to the mine situation?"

"All but the superintendent should be made convicts. That is simple. Merely make the mine crater another prison—the work will continue uninterrupted. Stallforth should be sent to the Crater of Dreams—"

"He shall die by torture," declared Lohan.

"No," said Winchester firmly. "He knows too much. He has a peculiar insight into the geologic structure of the Moon. It was he who discovered the veins they are now working. When those fail, he will discover more."

"From the Crater of Dreams—steeped in dope?" queried Lohan sarcastically.

"Yes. It is an intuitive matter. All we must do is put a helmet on him. Let his ideas and fantasies roam. Any slave could listen in on them, and if

that slave could remember them truly, he would appear to be a great metallurgist. We will know where other deposits are likely to be found, and how to get at them. Stallforth will be helpless to act, but the activity of his brain is left to us."

"A novel idea," murmured Lohan. "We should have thought of that sooner. Are there other scientists that we could profit from in the same manner?"

"Many. Few of them are truly loyal. Most resent the present regime. I would recommend dozens for the pit of dreams, including most of my former associates in botany and zoology. We need not put up with their sulky ways and obstinate behavior. All we have to do is give them a whiff of the gas and they have formed the habit."

"After that we need only listen in to reap the fruits of their uncontrolled thoughts. I assure you an era of unprecedented advance in the sciences will follow."

WINCHESTER paused to gauge the effect he had made. It was profound. Lohan had taken the bait, hook, line and sinker.

"Magnificent!" he exclaimed. "You shall do it."

"I only know some of them," reminded Winchester. "I would have to have access to the secret files to know the real capacities of the rest and their attitude toward us."

"You shall have it," said Lohan. "But back to the mines. You failed to state your recommendation concerning the Prince Li-Kiang. What should be done with him?"

"That is for your Lordship to say. If I were in your place, I should have him beheaded."

"As good as done. The order will go forth tonight. What else?"

Winchester scratched his head, pretending a reluctance he did not feel. He stammered several beginnings, as if uncertain what to say, then laid his plan down plainly. Lohan listened attentively throughout, nodding from time to time as he agreed with the several items.

There were too many AFPA men,

Winchester told him. Many of them were corrupt, as shown by the recent exposure of the late Number Eight.

"He is dead," interrupted Lohan, "and his death was not a pleasant one."

"There are others," reminded Winchester, and went on with his bill of indictment.

The mass of workers, he asserted, were content with mere subsistence. A great deal of the current unrest was due to the system set up to suppress them unnecessarily. That could be done away with at one stroke. Modify the system so that it would not be so galling, round up and imprison the known agitators in one grand haul. After that there would be little trouble.

"You can do this?" asked Lohan, sold to the tip of his toes.

"I can—given the information you have on file and unlimited authority."

"You have it," said Lohan, rising.

The two men stood up and faced one another.

"You have proclaimed yourself a selfish man," said Prince Lohan, deliberately. "You expect a reward for this service. What is it?"

"Power, first," said Winchester. "Then a wife of my own choosing."

"The first has already been granted," said Lohan smoothly. "We will see how you handle it. As to the wife, that will follow. Deliver what you promise and you shall have the inspection and choice of a hundred thousand maidens. Select which, or as many, as you choose. We will not quarrel about such a trivial detail."

"My selection is already made," said Winchester with dignity, "and your Excellency knows what it is. The power I ask is to be employed for your benefit. The reward should be for me alone. It is a small thing to request from one who has the entire population of the Earth and planets on which to draw."

"We shall see. We shall see," said Prince Lohan testily. "It is a point that can be debated later."

Winchester's gaze bored into the half-averted face before him. He wanted to defy the man then and

there; but there was too much at stake. Given the power he craved, he would not have to petition. He could demand and take. For once Winchester suppressed his primal instincts and pretended to accede.

"As your Lordship will have it," he said, but not too humbly. "We will postpone that discussion until you have seen the fruit of my work."

"So be it," said Lohan, gathering his skirts about him and rising.

It was a gesture of dismissal. Winchester took the hint, bowed, and backed away. At the prescribed distance of twenty backward paces, he bowed again, turned and stalked off into the forest.

The first step of the task he had undertaken had been accomplished. He had been given power to dispose of the revolutionists, and many of the dreaded AFPA men. With luck, everything else in his secret plan would follow.

So far, Cynthia was well and safe. There was no more that he could insist upon at this time without jeopardizing all his gains.

That night he received orders, telling him the Khan had decided he needed no advice on how to cultivate his parks. The so-called expert from the Moon could return to his regular duties.

Winchester took the midnight ferry back to the Central Receiving Station. He entered the royal suite which had been assigned him and sat for a long time slumped in an easy chair, thinking over the events of the past few days.

Now he had the tools of the destruction and reconstruction of a government in his hands.

How well could he use them?

CHAPTER XVIII

Reign of Terror

WHEN next Winchester sat at a desk in the great Central Station, it was in another capacity. He was robed in the green of the AFPA leaders, and resplendent in gold lace.

His numerical designation had shrunk to the smallest of all—Number One.

He had all power and was answerable only to Prince Lohan himself. It was a mighty and terrifying responsibility. It weighed on him, for the task he had set for himself, and outlined frankly to Lohan, called for the execution of thousands of men, the imprisonment at hard labor of tens of thousands more.

Far worse than that, he planned to inoculate the brainiest and ablest men of the System with the dreaded Lotusol habit. What if in the end he failed?

It was a sobering thought, but Winchester stiffened himself to the task. He must not fail! He must follow through on his desperate gamble with all the callous ruthlessness of the Mongoloids. If the salvation of the world—and his own and Cynthia's salvation—required a baptism of blood and tears, it would be done. And by his own hand!

His office was in the innermost part of the citadel and impenetrably guarded. Five concentric rings of secret doors and high-ranking police officials hemmed him in. His contacts were few and selected. Next in rank was Number Two, the custodian of the central files, where all that was to be known about every living man in the System was recorded.

Number Three was inspector-general, and supervised the work of Numbers Four to Fifteen, the twelve regional sub-chiefs. Number Two, Number Three and the prince were all who had voluntary access to Number One—Allan Winchester.

He proceeded cautiously with his program. There were many weeks needed for preparation for the numerous prisoners Winchester's huge dragnet would bring in. He sent an army of workmen to an immense and vacant crater, had it domed and filled with factories. This was to be his main disciplinary barracks.

The Lotusol works in the Botanical Gardens were quadrupled in size and put at once into capacity production. The American would need many gallons of the drug for the work in hand. Helmeted men under adequate protection invaded the Crater of Dreams, to

provide more slabs and sand clearings for the accommodation of the horde of addicts that were soon to come.

Winchester reported the progress on these projects to Lohan as they were done, but there were many details he did not see fit to dwell upon. One of these had to do with the armament provided for the disciplinary barracks. Another was his transfer of ten thousand men to the Botanical Section, to act as special gardeners.

Pending the completion of the construction work, Winchester studied transcripts of the secret files. It was tedious and confining work, but the efficient police had done a superlative job in neatly summarizing each man's character in a short paragraph. Keying every individual with a code number made review of millions of cases possible.

Sorting machines did much of the work. Winchester soon knew just what men he wanted to put in each category, whether they had ever been in the hands of the police, whether they lived on Earth, on the Moon, or any one of the otherwise autonomous planets.

For although many of the planets and satellites were private grants to high-ranking princes, the long hand of the AFPA reached out to all.

In time Winchester's lists were completed and the zero hour came. The American steeled himself and called his fifteen sub-chiefs to him. He handed each of them voluminous sheafs of instructions.

"It is our intention," he told them, "to obliterate at one stroke all possibility of revolt, now or hereafter. Two days ago, you will remember, I ordered all political prisoners transferred to the new disciplinary barracks, leaving only thieves and robbers in the old prisons.

"Tomorrow you will sweep the entire System, according to the lists just furnished you. They include every working man and minor foreman disloyal to his Sacred Highness, the Great Khan. They include the known agitators. So far as we know, they include every man of subversive tendencies living who is below the grade of superintendent or scientist.

"The disgruntled elements will be dealt with by the special Poison Squad under the direction of Number Three in person. Carry on! Dismissed."

AS the last of the green-garbed AFPA chieftains filed out, Winchester drew a sharp breath. He found his heart pounding, for he had included in his lists the names of many men known to him to be rebels, but who had hitherto escaped the suspicion of the AFPA.

If his daring plan failed, it meant the doom for all time of civilization as he had known it. Not one man of goodwill and energy had been left outside the purge—except those who enjoyed upper ratings. They were about to be exposed to a still more uncertain fate.

Winchester paced the floor anxiously, glancing at his chronometer from time to time. At last the bank of jewel-like monitor lights began to twinkle. The flood of reports was beginning to come in. His reign of terror had been launched!

He put on his audiohelmet and tuned in at random with his selective switch. There was a flickering of light and a mumble of disorganized sound.

The picture came in clearer.

Winchester viewed a street scene in Cosmopolis, through a scanner concealed under the window ledge of a building. Workers were streaming out from one of the great plastic plants and walking toward their barracks. Operatives of the AFPA were thick among the crowd.

Winchester saw two of them cruise up alongside a man and pin his arms. There was a whisper in his ear, and the man nodded. One of the operatives dropped astern and went after other prey. The other led the man around the next corner where a prison van was parked. The round-up was in progress.

The American flicked the switch. There was more blinking, and then he was looking into a room from the vantage point of its molding. This was the office of the Curator-in-Chief of the Botanical Gardens, Winchester's former superior. The door opened and three helmeted men walked in.

The old chief stood up in surprise. But as the leading operative suddenly snapped the neck of a small vial he carried in his hand, the scientist inhaled a deep breath. On the instant he sank back into his chair, with the expression of idiotic vacuity characteristic of the Lotus-eaters.

The invading operative has just opened an ampule of the compelling Lotusol!

The men moved swiftly then. One produced a shiny helmet and snapped it on the old man's head. Another brought forth a welding torch. At a stroke he welded the chin strap tight. Then the two hustled the botanist from the room.

Winchester turned to the next adjacent scanner. It was on the front of the building. Through it he could see them put the old scientist into a sealed van, where the atmosphere was pure vapor of Lotus. The wagon rolled away.

Winchester changed his tuning wave. Now he was on a special band, which emanated from telepathic transmitters incorporated in the helmets of the denizens of the Crater of Dreams. The new helmets Winchester had made were not like the ones formerly used.

Instead of being on a single private wave, accessible only to a favorite individual Mongoloid, these helmets had a common denominator. The Master receiver Winchester wore could tune in on any of them at his discretion. Beside that, each sender had its automatic receiver, which kept a continuous record of all the thoughts that came in over it.

The American had natural reluctance to tune in on a man's private thoughts. But it was imperative that he know just how the drug hit a man of genuine intellectual capacity.

He soon found out. The subject was his former superior—the Curator-in-Chief at the Botanical Gardens.

At the moment the drug struck his nostrils, the curator must have been engaged in a brown study about the Venusian drip-fern. This was a plant of rather extraordinary medicinal qualities, inasmuch as its essential oil contained three of the vital hor-

mones found within the human body.

Winchester gasped at the first revelation that came to him. His ex-chief, now that the workings of his mind were no longer inhibited by practical prohibitions, was speculating on the possibility of crossing the fern with the Titanian fungus!

It was no less than revolutionary.

The two plants were fundamentally different; the one living in humid, hot air, the other in the bleak near-vacuum of twilight Uranus, where even Radon liquefies and lies in rosy pools!

Yet Winchester saw at once the value of the dream, if it could be made practicable. Until then the oils of both plants had been blended in the pharmaceutical laboratories, but at great expense, to make a product invaluable to man—a specific against five different types of germs.

If the plants could be crossed successfully, it would mean that the hybrid would produce the ultimate oil by natural processes. Man would have only to tap the plant's veins.

CURIOS, the American tuned in on other scientists just inoculated by the Poison Squad. Not all were so productive. Many of their dreams were so wild and impracticable as to cause shudders to run down the spine. Yet here and there among them were ideas worth developing, so daring that men in their normal senses would never entertain them seriously for a moment. But once formulated, competent scientists could look these schemes over in cold calculation, separate the hopelessly fantastic from those that were soundly based.

Again the fear of failure gripped Winchester. What scientists would look them over? In a few hours there would be no more sober and sane scientists. His dragnet had them all. It was true that robot receivers were busily recording every thought sent out by the drug-maddened victims. But who was there left to review them, to decide which deserved development and which not?

"I must not fail," Winchester said.

A week saw the end of the first grand sweep. The new disciplinary

barracks was crammed with prisoners and its mills hummed. Regiments of guards surrounded the inmates, armed with every weapon current in that day—heat and electron guns, and the dreaded paralyzers.

On the roof heavy lightning throwers defended the place against any conceivable effort to storm it and release the imprisoned revolutionaries. It was an impregnable fortress.

The Crater of Dreams was packed to capacity. In it now reclined every scientist and engineer of note, as well as most of the former plant managers. They were slothful and indolent, dreaming day and night, sending out pulsations of thought that were appalling in their audacity.

Invariably the dreamers worked from the basis of their own memories and special capacities. But their illusions were embroidered with whimsical variations, inconceivable to a man of sane mind. Whatever course the destiny of mankind might take thereafter, these drugged intellectuals were helpless to aid or hinder.

There were no more rebels or dissenters. All had been accounted for. That is, all but Allan Winchester himself and Cynthia. And of these two, but one held the key that might with luck unlock the myriad of now helpless prisoners.

A silver gong sounded. It was the personal call of Prince Lohan himself.

"My lord?" said Winchester, answering promptly.

The full-length figure of the prince appeared upon the television screen.

"You have done well—better even than you promised. I did not know there were so many. But what of the double-crossers in my own organization?"

"That is the next step, my lord. You will be shocked at their number, but my findings are unimpeachable. I should warn you—there are wearers of the yellow among them."

"I know," said the prince, and his face was hard as nails. "They will be treated as they deserve. Name them."

"The Prince Kow Foong, the Prince Ha-Ting, the woman known as

Kuka San, favorite of the Khan—"

On he went, reciting the names of many of the great. On the list were five princes of the blood, twelve grand dukes and forty-seven minor aristocrats, including the governor of Callisto. All had conspired for accession to the throne or the assassination of Lohan and his consort.

"I will attend to them," said Lohan, and his voice was like a file biting into a resonant plateglass. "What of my agents?"

"I am sorry to inform your Highness that of my fifteen highest-ranking associates, only two are to be trusted. These are Number Six and Number Fourteen. The rest merit death."

"They shall die—and tonight," said Lohan with great finality. "The rest?"

"The rest I will deal with," said Winchester.

HE watched Lohan's image fade. Then he brought out his lists. The first was a short one. It consisted of four hundred and three cell leaders—dangerous and cruel men, all. Next came a longer one, the roster of the regular AFPA operatives of the third and fourth grades. It numbered above ten thousand. There followed the names of five times as many more stool pigeons, and a selection from the ranks of the more brutal prison guards.

Winchester called his fifteen subordinates. They were still unaware of their own impending fate.

"These men are to be executed within the hour. If you doubt my authority, any one of you is at liberty to appeal to His Highness. That is all."

One by one they acknowledged, but with awe-struck eyes.

Again Winchester sat back, tense and on edge, until the glimmer of the monitor lights began bringing in the confirmation that his orders were being executed. This time he did not look on. For although he knew that every man marked for the purge richly deserved all that could be done to him, Winchester had no desire to witness his death agonies.

Yet the glint of supreme satisfaction was in his eyes. The iron of per-

secution had branded him deeply, to the very heart. Whether he failed or not, this night many a scoundrel would go to his just doom. The world would be rid of its cruelest tormentors.

Then Winchester thought of Cynthia, restless and impatient in her precarious rôle as handmaiden to the royal princess. He stole toward the princely television set and examined it. A moment later he called an electrician.

"But it is death, horrible death, to do that," whispered the man in terror.

"It will be still more horrible if you do not," said Winchester grimly.

The man began to work. His hands trembled violently.

"Now you can do it, Excellency," he said, but his face was ghastly pale. "There is two-way transmission."

"Thank you," said Winchester.

His ray-gun was in his hand. Without a moment's hesitation he blasted the man out of existence. The fellow was high up on his list of proscription, for his crimes were many. He was the best wire-tapper on the Moon. Now he had done his last job.

Winchester sniffed the acrid smoke of what had a moment before been a man. He had only advanced the man's ordered death by a few hours. It was a detail he must not worry over.

With considerable trepidation he approached the controls. In a moment he would be listening in on Prince Lohan's private palace, in its beautiful location in Southern Germany.

Slowly he tuned in and was rewarded by the return glow as the screen warmed. From his point of vantage he was looking over the shoulder of Princess Chen Chin. Directly facing him was Cynthia. And her eyes were full of horror!

Lohan is so clever. He left me only a moment ago. He has achieved what he set out to do—extinguish at one stroke all seeds of rebellion, and at the same time purge his own ranks.

"Now that he has done that he will throw your man in with the rest. He just boasted of it and taunted me with it! He says that now that your Winchester has served his purpose, he has sent his red-striped hellions to assassinate him. They will leave shortly and land on the Moon within four hours.

"Your man is done for!" the princess said brokenly. "After that, Lohan promises, you will succumb to his advances. I can tell you, child, that man can be vile when he chooses. He has methods you would never dream of—"

"It can't be," moaned Cynthia, "it can't be! I won't—I won't, I don't care what he does! But if only we could warn Allan—that is all that matters now—"

Allan Winchester shut the machine off. He had had his warning and there was no time to spare. His own fate and that of Cynthia's hung in the balance. All was lost unless he acted quickly.

He cast anxious eyes about him. He knew already that the ranks of his outer guards were thinning, for many of them had been marked for the purge. It took but the work of a moment to order the inner sentries to reinforce the recently depleted outer guards.

In a few seconds Winchester was free from the supervision that necessarily accompanies a man of great rank. The men who watched over his inner office were on their way to cubicles down corridors many hundreds of feet away.

He ran into the great file room where the basic records of millions of men were kept. For once he was thankful for the mysterious way in which the data for them had been submitted. Those damning reports had come in via television and were recorded as they came. Their source was lost. They could not be reconstructed except from the mem-

CHAPTER XIX

Catastrophe

THE princess was sobbing and wringing her hands.

"Oh, oh, my dear," she was crying, "if only we could save him! But we

ories of men, most of whom were now dead or in the act of dying.

If the photo-recorded files were destroyed, the work of half a century of AFPA activity would be lost. No one could know what any number signified, nor the detailed record of any man.

Winchester surveyed swiftly the precautions previously made to preserve the priceless records. He also noted their inflammable nature, engraved as they were on reels of magnesium wire. He had only to seize a wrench and wreck beyond repair the valves leading to the sprinkler system.

Then he built a fire and shut the steel doors, to which only he and the now defunct Number Two had keys. In a few minutes the central files would be an inferno of flames, and the ashes would yield nothing.

All the carefully gleaned confidential information as to each citizen in the System would go up in smoke. Even the identity of the numbered slaves and convicts would be lost. No one could know who was in for what, or for how long.

Winchester hastily stripped. He shifted to one of the many disguises available—that of a common workman of Cosmopolis. Then he lifted his transmitter and called Number Fourteen down the corridor.

"Number One speaking," he said, in as cold and casual a voice as he could muster. "I have just been interviewing a most valuable witness and have let him go, thinking he was immune from arrest. He is tall and dressed in brown, and is walking down 'D' passage. He is a dangerous man, but I want him kept for further questioning.

"Grab him and send him at once to the Primary Barracks, but take care not to harm him in any way. His record will follow."

"I understand," said the faithful Number Fourteen.

WINCHESTER hung up and glanced down at his brown garments. A distinct change, these poor clothes, from his robes of authority. He took one backward

glance at the door to the file room, which was already reddening and beginning to bulge.

He had taken the precaution to sever the wires to the general alarm system, but a fire of that heat could not be concealed long. Within a few minutes the castle would be swarming with fire-fighters. He must be clear of the building before then.

Winchester crawled under his desk and raised a hidden hatch. In another moment he was sliding down the spiral way, until he came up against a door four floors below. By the use of special keys and an intricate knowledge of the place, he soon was out in an empty corridor and hurrying along it. He dreaded the details of his capture, but it was a thing that had to be.

It was not long in coming. He rounded another corner and then heard the harsh order.

"Halt!"

He quickened his stride, only to be confronted by another of the fast-thinning guards. There was a spurt of light, and Winchester found himself writhing on the floor, paralyzed and in agony. He looked at the man who had brought him down. It was Severs, one of the men on his list for destruction. Apparently they had not gotten to him yet.

Other soldiers rushed up, and Winchester was seized and hurried along toward the exit. He saw only, as he left, that two of the newly arrived guards had pulled Severs to one side.

"Good work, buddy," he thought he heard one of them say. "Step this way, will you? The boss wants to see you."

At least the AFPA purge of its most effective agents was being carried out, with all the thoroughness and fidelity to orders for which that body was notorious.

It was, thought Winchester, a type of murderous efficiency with successfully destroyed itself.

His entry into the disciplinary barracks was inconspicuous enough. His two captors simply turned him over to the gate guard. They noted his serial number and the red star emblazoned on his back. Then they shot

him on into the herd of prisoners.

Winchester lost no time in seeking out his old friend Heim. He was somewhere there, he knew, for he himself had committed him. He had ransacked the Heim file and examined the man's record from childhood on. The fellow was reliable. He was a true patriot and idealist, brave to the point of recklessness, and utterly dependable.

It took Winchester hours, among those cluttered thousands, but at last he came upon the man, seated in the midst of a group of other red star convicts.

"As I live and breathe!" ejaculated Heim. "My old sidekick—Rip Van Winkle! I thought they had done you in."

"Not me," grinned Winchester, and he squatted beside them. "Not yet."

"S-sh-h," he warned a moment later. "I've got to talk with you. Big things are coming up."

"You're telling me?" said Heim, with a hard laugh. "A round-up like this isn't done for nothing. Look! They've got every one of us—all the men that I know, and hundreds more I never heard about. But so far as I know, not a stool pigeon in the lot. Somehow, after you've been a con awhile, you learn to smell 'em out."

"Right," said Winchester. "Every stool pigeon died, not an hour ago. I know. I had the list, and I ordered their execution."

Heim never batted an eyelash.

"Poor kid," he said commiseratingly, looking sharply at his old friend. "So stir's got you at last, too? I thought you could take it."

"I could. I did," said Winchester grimly. "And I'm not nuts. Listen!"

FOR an hour he talked into the other man's ear. Now he need not fear lip-reading or eavesdropping stool pigeons about, nor did he care a hang about the concealed telemicrophones and scanners adroitly placed about the walls. Their leads were blind now. Their impressions would be carried only to burned and charred instruments, in the ruins of what had been the central files. The precautions he had taken had been thorough.

"You!" exclaimed Heim, drawing back in the traditional fear born of years of dealing with masked agents.

"Yes, I!" Winchester was vehement. "I was the AFPA chief. I ordered these things. Given another three days, we would have had the world in our hands, to take as we liked. I would have moved the remnants of the AFPA from here and substituted puppet guards."

We could have had access to the vast stores of weapons in the prison arsenal. But I was not allowed to finish the job. Lohan beat me to the punch."

"Then we're sunk," said Heim desperately, and with a touch of reproach. "What if you did have thousands of guards and agents and spies killed? They will find others. You have imprisoned us all and disabled our brains. There is no one left out-side to help, or care."

"They will kill us off by degrees—work, work, work, poor food, the lash, torture. It would have been better if you had never come."

"No," Winchester said resolutely. "All is *not* lost. We are stronger than ever. We are here—tens of thousands of us—with but one thought and one idea—freedom! There is not a man under this dome not in uniform that you cannot trust with your life. The spies have died miserably, the cruellest of the guards have gone the same way."

"For once we have a chance to organize. Let's get at it! We must strike before Lohan brings up his red-striped palace guards and his aristocratic cruiser force. We must—"

"Ha!" snorted Heim. "We would not last a day. They will hunt you down like a snake, and the other ring-leaders as well. Your purge, as you call it, will appear as child's play beside what the Mongoloids will do. Their memories are long and they are vicious and vindictive."

"Their memories are no longer than their records," retorted Winchester. "The records have been destroyed, as well as the men who made them. The agents who knew me by sight are dead now, every last one of them. Only Lohan himself could pick me out from

this mob—and he dare not try. “The instant I destroyed the files, the numbers on our backs became meaningless. There is no way for them to know whether you or I or any other man is more dangerous than some poor fellow, let us say, who was sent here simply because he failed to perform the kow-tow quickly.”

Heim remained gloomily unconvinced.

“I meant to put the weapons in your hands. I was forestalled,” Winchester went on in eager earnestness. “There, and there only, I failed. There is only one thing to do. We must make our weapons. We can still prevail!”

Heim laughed outright, and held out his open hands.

“What weapons?” he asked hollowly. “They have paralyzers, ray and electron guns that kill instantly and at a distance. And we are expected to attack them with sticks! Behind these guards we see stands the army—the picked force kept on Earth to protect the Khan.”

“If by some miracle we could overcome the guards, they would send in the army. No. Empty-handed we can do nothing, except offer the same sullen resistance we have always presented.”

“No alert man has to go empty-handed long,” asserted Winchester, trying to bolster the man with his own assurance. “Long before the invention of such weapons as the paralyzer and the electron gun, men fought wars and killed each other. The history books were burned before your time, but not before mine. What weapons we need, we can make or improvise.”

“Like what?” Heim demanded.

“I will show you,” said Winchester quietly, and he began to make marks upon the floor.

tion reigning among the surviving AFPA men, now that they had learned how they had been tricked.

He had a vivid mental picture of their chagrin, as they poked among the ashes of the records, only to find that the work of two generations had gone up in smoke.

But the grimmest satisfaction of all was to be had from picturing Lohan's fury, as soon as the prince should come and learn the truth. It was easy to predict that in his mad rage, Lohan would have all the surviving guards at Central Station summarily executed.

Yes, the resourceful American had time—a few hours, at least.

He and Heim worked frantically to make the most of them. For the nucleus of the revolt, they chose but a hundred of their closest friends at first. These were sent scurrying about the machinery in the dome, gathering up the material Winchester had asked for.

In half an hour, piles of metal parts lay about, and men were plying their tools feverishly to fashion the wooden stocks their leader had sketched out for them.

“Now, look, men,” said Winchester, seeing everything needed was at hand. “In the old days before death rays were invented, men fought by hurling missiles. In my time, this was done by firing lumps of steel out of steel tubes by means of a powerful explosive. But long before the invention of the rifle and cannon, men had developed other ways.

“The one I am about to show you was among the most deadly. It is silent and makes no flash, yet will kill surely and efficiently at a considerable distance.”

He picked up one of the hardwood stocks. A skilled workman handed him a slightly curved blade of metal. It was a leaf from a spring made for one of the small ore cars used on the Moon, but modified for its new purpose. Winchester fastened it to the small end of the stock.

Next he added a ratchet and a pawl and rigged them to the side of the stock, together with an operating lever. He inserted a trigger mechan-

CHAPTER XX

Final Challenge

WINCHESTER had a little time, he knew. He grinned in triumph as he imagined the consterna-

ism, last of all strung a short length of high-tensile wire from one end of the spring to the other.

"This is a crossbow," explained Winchester, "and I energize it thus."

He engaged the wire of the bow on the trigger, and began jacking it backward by turning the ratchet.

"The spring is now under great tension. I place an iron bolt in this groove and aim so . . ."

WINCHESTER looked about him. Perched in a swinging gondola above them was one of the ever-present guards. At the moment he was not alert, since the conspirators had worked so quietly that no suspicion had been aroused. Winchester drew a careful bead on him, allowing for the curve of the trajectory. He squeezed the trigger.

There was a sharp, low twang—in-audible above the roar of the busy shop—and the bent spring sprang back to straightness with a jerk. The whizzing bolt had sped away, propelled by the powerful kinetic force released. The convicts followed its flight with eager eyes.

They saw a red blotch appear behind the guard's ear, saw him slump without a whimper to the floor of his hanging lookout.

They started, listening; but there was no other sound to follow. The general alarm did not ring. The stricken guard had had no time to give it, and no one else had heard or seen.

The prisoners needed no further demonstration. Each grabbed a set of parts laid out before him and began hastily assembling his own weapon. In a few minutes Heim was among them, whispering to each where he was to go, and passing out ammunition.

"Two of you will account for each guard," Winchester instructed them carefully.

"Just in case one misses. If we are lucky, we can knock them all off before they can muster their reserves. Then, as the relief shift comes on, we'll go at them while they are on their way to their posts."

The men nodded and slipped away in pairs.

Not all the guards were killed at

the first shot, or even hit. Some heard the clang of the bolt against their armored niches and stood up to peer down at the throng below. The second or third bolt usually did its work. In no case did a sentry realize his danger in time to jab the button that would set the sirens howling.

Winchester's men swiftly climbed to the lookout perches and robbed the dead guardsmen of their weapons. A half hour later they lay in half a hundred separate ambushes. They brought down the new guard as it came in to relieve the old.

"We have a hundred paralyzers now," Winchester exulted, "and as many lightning guns. The next step will be to turn in the alarm. It should come from a distant building, while we wait here near the sally-port of the guardhouse. I have sent a man already—he should be at his post at any moment."

Gongs began to clang and the sirens wail. Winchester ran, leading his resolute gang to an outside corner of the guardhouse. They arrived just as the gates swung open and the riot squad burst forth. The convict fire caught the guardsmen on the flank and unawares, since they were bent on getting to the building whence the false alarm had come.

The surprised soldiers went down in windrows under the hail of lightning bolts and paralytic rays.

"Never mind them—they're washed up!" yelled Winchester. "Into the guardhouse, quick, before the door is closed!"

The inner guards were quickly disposed of. But by that time the great triple - warning signal was being blasted out by a gigantic, deep-throated whistle. The steel doors cutting the soldiers' barracks and the arsenal into many minute compartments closed automatically. The room where the reserves and riot squad had been idling was effectively cut off from the rest of the building.

"Not that way," Winchester shouted to a prisoner who was blasting away with a flame-thrower. "Save your fire until Heim comes up with our reserves."

He stooped over and rifled the pockets of the dead Officer of the Day.

Heim came pounding up with two hundred more selected convicts, some of whom had armed themselves from the corpses of the defunct riot squad.

"It pays to have been a policeman here," Winchester said grimly, as he fingered the small mechanism he had taken from the man who lay at his feet.

"I know how those locks work. They are magnetic. You don't use keys, but set this gadget and wave it before a certain spot. Follow me closely with your men—and blast down every guard you see. Behind the third door we go through, there's enough equipment for an army."

They met with little opposition. Winchester's purge of "disloyal" police had been drastic indeed. Wholesale execution had left every post on the Moon short-handed. The two sets of sentries, plus the riot squad, must have represented most of the garrison. The few rebels they met in the passages went out of existence with a flicker of blue fire. It took but two minutes to reach the armory door.

"Pass out arms to everyone," ordered Winchester. "Mop up the remainder of the guards, then man the defenses of the dome and the outer walls. It won't be long before the Khan's cruisers will be coming. One of these guards must surely have sent for them."

"And," he added significantly, "if they didn't, I will!"

The convicts ran by the thousands to their stations, shouting and leaping for joy and waving their weapons in elation. At last, after years of unutterable misery and harsh treatment, they had been given a chance to win their freedom.

Throughout the dome loud speakers were bawling now as Winchester unfolded his strategy.

"We hold this fort," he told them, "and we are armed. The enemy you feared the most are now few. There are not many police left alive—and *no spies!* You can fight back to back and feel safe. Your neighbor will not betray you."

"The foes coming to meet us are

soldiers. We can deal with them. Once they and their flat-faced overlords are out of the way, the entire Solar System is ours. We can then go to Cosmopolis and the Earth, and release our friends and kinsmen from bondage."

THE rebels heard and thrilled. Some fingered their ray-guns. Others, assigned to the great siege projectors, stationed on the outer walls, manipulated the intricate mechanisms with skilled fingers.

"Stand by!" warned Winchester. "Here they come!"

Six silvery shapes had soared into the void from the distant Lunar Base. The formation split into three pairs and maneuvered for the attack. Winchester watched them tensely, his hands guiding the master control of one of the huge projectors. Heim was at another, and men as steady as the rest.

"Wait for the blink as they open their shutters to fire—then let them have it! We'll be hit, but if we fire first it will give them warning. They do not know such big guns have been mounted here."

"What a surprise they're in for!" murmured a helper nearby, patting his range dial affectionately.

Two blasts flared out almost simultaneously. Winchester saw the pair of cruisers nearest him dip, caught the flicker as they unmasked their projectors. He pressed his button.

For a long moment he sat with tightly shut eyes, unable to open them, even behind his protective goggles, because of the intolerable brilliance of the fierce electronic exchange.

He felt the crater rim under him shiver, heard the tumbling of thousands of tons of liquid, as portions of the wall disintegrated and fell away in glowing lava.

There were no screams of the injured. In that electric holocaust men simply ceased to exist. But Winchester could still feel and breathe, and therefore knew he was untouched.

He opened his eyes. Then he stared incredulously about him. Everything had changed. He was seated on a

pinnacle of tottering masonry. For three thousand yards to the north, the outer wall was gone. To the south it was badly battered.

All the mighty projectors on that side were out of action—melted and fused. The great cables that fed them had been turned to greenish vapor by the blast. Winchester must have lost many of his best men. The cruisers had hit, and hit hard.

He turned his eyes upward and swept the sky. His scowl changed slowly to gratified amazement, and then his face spread into a smile. Overhead were two blobs of thin vapor, rapidly dissipating. To the north and south were the other four cruisers—disintegrating!

The Great Khan's main fleet was no more!

CHAPTER XXI

Force Meets Force

A GAIN Winchester stuck his periscope up through the cleft in the glazed wreckage of the east wall. He could see the advancing Mongoloid hordes distinctly now, looking more like an army of goblins than of men. They were feeling their way across the bare Lunar plane, and dragging with them huge portable projectors.

It required hundreds of straining tractors to haul the mighty engines of destruction and their cumbersome generators. But in time the Mongoloids would reach the weakest point of the rebels' defenses—the shattered east wall.

"It won't be long now," Winchester warned over the loudspeaker system. "Be ready on the right and left, but do not open up until I order."

He settled to his vigil. The massed enemy was not yet in range. But their army already was deploying under the partial cover of several thick clumps of Lunar brush.

Winchester had been given a long breathing spell since the first battle. It had enabled him to patch up his defenses. Immediately after the destruction of the Khan's fleet, he had found a couple of televisors still

working. This enabled him to do some scouting inside the Mongoloid strongholds, before they discovered his prying eye and demolished the scanners wherever they were.

The flashes Winchester had of conditions in Lunar Base, in the gutted Central Station, in Cosmopolis and elsewhere were comforting. The enemy was badly rattled, and uncertain what to do.

Since their air power was gone, except for a few small units beyond the orbit of Mars, and their police virtually nonexistent, they could not attack from above nor within. They must make a frontal assault. To do that, they had drawn to Lunar Base every soldier on the Moon, and the reserves from Earth. Now that attack was coming, but it had taken them a week to prepare.

Winchester had not been idle. He had sent scores of men as propaganda agents to all the centers of the Moon abandoned by the police. Their job was to inform the docile workers of what was taking place, prepare them for the overturn that was soon to come.

Thousands of other men had been dispatched to the now deserted Botanical Gardens, to bring up certain materials Winchester planned to use in his defense strategy. They took with them many tractor locomotives and long strings of trailers, and were escorted by a heavy body of armed men.

Heim took charge of the local repairs. He had managed to dismount some of the undamaged projectors from the west wall. They had been reset in pits in front of the ruined eastern barrier.

The last of the work was finished and the stage cleared. Winchester made a minor adjustment to his focus and looked at the enemy again. Now he saw what he had been expecting for some time. It was the black and gold-banded space yacht of Prince Lohan, gliding down out of the void above. It circled, just out of range, and settled on a spiny knob to the south of the battlefield.

Lohan had come to direct the assault in person. Winchester grunted in contentment. Let it be so. This

was the final duel. It would be but a matter of minutes until they would know who was the stronger.

Winchester stiffened with new alertness. The Mongoloid columns were coming ahead again. In a moment they would enter the bushes. A half mile this side they would advance into the range of his concealed projectors.

But doom struck many of them long before that. A ripple of flashes ran along the plain from the northern to the southern horizons. The vanguard had marched boldly into the thicket of transplanted floribombs, and the explosive plants were detonating in chain-style.

Fragments of men and parts of tractors flew skyward in a hail of flung gravel. Where regiments had been an instant before, there was now a string of ragged craters into which the oncoming projectors plunged and overturned.

"That worked!" called Heim, over their private line.

"And how," exulted Winchester.

BUT the ambush was not the lucky accident it seemed. It had been planned that way. Winchester knew his plants; knew, too, that the floribombs were due soon to come to maturity. His experts had selected them with care, had had them transplanted by the trainload. Results of years of experimentation had furnished the plants' rate of development, almost by the hour.

Their growth could be expedited or retarded by the administration of certain chemicals to the soil. An hour ago Winchester had pulled his gardeners in and they had reported the trap set. In five or ten hours the plants would begin going off spontaneously.

In the meantime, the slightest touch would detonate them. Well—the Mongoloids had "touched" them!

The explosions threw the Mongol army into confusion for some time. Their leaders managed finally to extricate some of the offensive projectors and reform. Shortly they were on the march again.

The Sun dazzled Winchester's eyes,

but he did not mind. The Sun was an ally. It was half-heaven high in front of him and shining on the enemy's back. He dropped his glasses to scan the intervening terrain. Close to the attackers now was that wide band of discoloration that marked the plain.

Those tons of Martian migratory moss had first been dumped at the very foot of the ruined eastern wall. But following its instinct to creep toward the light, the moss had spread itself out and begun its slimy trek to the east.

Winchester watched the first enemy tractor hit it. The juggernaut was grotesquely helpless as it slithered and skidded sideward. The front ranks of the Mongol fighters clutched at emptiness and fell, like ungainly skaters on slick ice.

But the pressure of the rear ranks and the momentum of the rolling projectors brought the army on, until more and more were fighting for a precarious foothold. Not only that, but the slippery moss underfoot was advancing too, and in the opposite direction.

"It's pretty good now, isn't it?" queried Heim.

"Practically perfect," said Winchester, consulting his range. "Let 'em have it!"

The masked batteries of giant projectors belched their lightning. It was a flawless enfilade, a crisscross of devastating fire. The gunners paused to see the damage, then shifted the angle of their barrage a trifle.

Once more the projectors let loose. The sudden holocaust of blue and green that answered from the plain told that men and machines had disintegrated into fiery atoms. Two more blasts and the battle was over.

"Up and at 'em!" yelled Winchester. "Mop up by hand! There are only a few left and they are running."

He swung his glass to cover Lohan's flagship. It sat strangely still, as if an animate thing stunned by the annihilation of its allies. Winchester ran from televisor to televisor, trying to find one that would work, but on none of them could he raise Lohan.

A sudden panic seized him. Were

they all dead on board, and if so, how? He flew down a passage by bounds until he came to an elevator that was still in operation. A moment later he was in a lunabile, charging across the plain.

He took pains to skirt the mossy patch, though it meant a long detour. Eventually he came to the foot of the knob on which the yacht was grounded. From there he climbed, impatient at the space-suit he had to wear, for it impeded him when he wanted to all but fly. His victory would be incomplete until he had Lohan face to face, to inform him of his doom.

Winchester used his police mag-

breath as long as I could and ducked in here. I don't know what happened after I left. I am afraid to look I was—"

"Smart girl," said Winchester, giving her a fond pat. "You get into that outer lock now and I'll go and see. I'll be all right in my helmet, so don't worry if I am gone awhile. It may take a little time to clear the air in there."

Inside he found what had come to be a familiar sight. Prince Lohan sat grinning stupidly, a helpless imbecile. In another compartment several of his red-slashed personal guards wallowed, murmuring sweet words, full of sound but devoid of meaning.

NEXT ISSUE'S HALL OF FAME STORY

THE MAKING OF MISTY ISLE

By
STANTON A.
COBLENTZ



ONE OF SCIENTIFCTION'S OUTSTANDING CLASSICS

neto-key to open the outer spacelock. He found it was a double one—for safety—and that within it was another. He opened it and slid the first door shut behind him.

IN a corner lay a sobbing huddle of clothes—a woman. He sprang to her and drew her to her feet. In another instant he and Cynthia were in impassioned embrace.

"But what—why—" he stammered, tearing off his helmet and kissing her furiously.

"I did it, I did it," she moaned. "I had to. It was the end. I broke that little bottle and ran. You said its vapors were dangerous, so I held my

A pair of domestic slaves clung to one another, babbling incoherently. Princess Chen Chin lay with a beatific smile on her face, oblivious to the world. Lotusol had done its work, and well.

Winchester turned up the blowers and threw on the overboard vent. He waited the prescribed time, then cut them off and bled fresh air out of the compressor banks. He went out and brought Cynthia in. She shuddered at what she saw, but she finished her story.

"He said he was going to show us how to deal with rebels and traitors," she said. "He forced us both to come. When he saw that all was lost, he

felled the princess at a blow and grabbed at me. He said the time for compromise and tricks had passed. If he could not get me one way, he would another. And so—I smashed the little bottle. Did I do wrong?"

"You did exactly right," Winchester assured her with a tender hug. "I had other plans for him, but perhaps this is better. Let them go out with their minds filled with grandiose dreams. It is the kinder way."

"But she?"

"She would not want to live without him, and he is too dangerous a man to let breathe. It may seem hard, but it is best."

Cynthia put on a space-suit and followed him out.

"The king is dead—long live the king," she said softly, putting her hand in his.

"There will be no more kings," he said, and his face was stern.

CHAPTER XXII

Back to Earth

WHAT I don't understand, darling," Cynthia said the next day, "is why you had to be so hard on the scientists. Lohan was surprised when he saw your list—he said he would not have slain or imprisoned more than a third of them. Yet you condemned all. It gave him confidence in you. But wasn't it a stiff price?"

"We will see," Allan Winchester said darkly. He was troubled about the scientists, engineers and industrial managers. "Let's go over to the quarantine station."

They arrived and were received with great ceremony by the staff. Winchester led Cynthia into a long ward. Rows of beds lined the walls and sleeping men reclined upon them, many with childlike smiles on their faces. Attendants wandered among them bearing syringes, and stopped occasionally to puncture an arm and inject a shot of rosy serum.

In the next ward the patients tossed

uneasily and unsmiling. One sat up, blinking.

"Where am I?" he demanded. "How did I get to this place?"

Another man was struggling with two nurses, as if anxious to fight. Winchester strode on through and into a solarium where others sat, pale and wan, but awake and sane. They were distinguished-looking men, most of them, all highly intelligent.

"It is working," he said, with an air of profound relief. "It was the most daring part of my gamble."

Cynthia looked at him inquiringly.

"You see," he explained, "more than half of these men are of pronounced liberal views. Had there been a prolonged civil war, all of them would have been killed. It was not because I wanted to impress Lohan with my zeal, but to save these men, that I placed them in the quiet backwater of the Crater of Dreams.

"I had experimented on myself and had found there was an antidote for the Lotus habit. I was hopeful it would work on others, but I could not be sure, especially in cases of long standing.

"By blending the powerful stimulant ergogen with Lotusol and injecting it, we give an almost negative dose. Gradually, by reducing the drug and increasing the stimulant, the patient is brought out of the habit without shock.

"You have seen the three main stages. Most of the patients will come back. If they do not, my revolution was fought in vain.

"Cynthia, you spoke of kings. Civilization would lapse into barbaric chaos without men like these. They are the true kings of tomorrow—a Congress of Kings!"

"You are strong. You have saved civilization. Why don't you run it?" Cynthia asked heatedly, out of her blind loyalty.

"Because," he answered bluntly, "I don't know enough. No single man is good enough to play god. It is all very well to say that a benevolent despotism is the happiest form of government. But who is to succeed the despot when he dies?

"Who is to slap him down if he

gets swell-headed and begins to believe what his yes-men tell him? It is too much of a load to throw on any one human being. History is full of men who started out well, but the sequel is invariably ugly. Too much power is not good for even the greatest man."

Winchester chose his words slowly. "Civilization is an intricate mechanism today—a human mechanism. The despot, the dictator is a back number. Today we need scientists—chemists, physicists and the like.

"We need artists of every kind—not impractical dreamers, but men and women who can make the world a better place in which to live, because of the talent God has given them.

"We need economists and administrators to manage our industrial and agricultural system. We need architects to plan, engineers to build, physicians to keep our bodies healthy. We need a form of government which serves as an arbiter for all classes, so that no one group may have undue advantage over the other."

There was puzzlement in the girl's eyes.

"But—it took a man of your stature, Allan, to overthrow the old regime, so that all these things may be possible!"

WINCHESTER kissed her for that.

"Right you are, darling. But I was only the instrument of man's conscience, nothing more. I have done my job. Now I shall turn my power over to democratically constituted authority. Things do not always work smoothly in a democracy, I'll grant you that.

"But it does have one paramount advantage. It's flexible. No one man can ever seize dictatorial power. Mistakes may be made, and are. But in the long run, things work out for the best."

He took Cynthia in his arms then, held her for a long fervent embrace. He released her and walked back through the wards. He wanted to be alone, now. He wanted to savor his great triumph in the privacy of his own soul.

He wanted to plan for the morrow, when the Solar System would be once more the master of its destiny.

Allan Winchester was at peace with himself, at last.

In the days that followed, he disbanded his army. He had needed brute force to overcome brute force, since that was the only language the enemy understood. Hereafter there would be no need of it.

Heim took over the management of Lunar Tramways, and his other followers similarly fell into their proper places in the restored Utopia. Each went back to his former place, with head held high and confidence in the future. Hereafter they would be working for themselves and their fellows, not under the lash of slave-drivers.

The culminating moment came when Winchester addressed the assembled scientists and technicians at the new Constitutional Convention.

"It's all yours now," he told them. "Take care only that what you have endured will not have to be endured again."

* * * * *

The Earth ferry that day had two eager passengers, who pressed their noses against the forward lookout port who exclaimed in wonder as the glories of the mother planet unfolded themselves before them.

"It's good to get back to Earth again," Cynthia said.

"Yes," agreed Winchester. "I was not born to be a leader of men. I like my own little job better."

"And what are you—we—going to do," she ventured, "now that you have resigned?"

"We are going to a warm, moist place. Louisiana, I think, will be best. And there I mean to establish an experimental farm. There are many of those exotic plants that interest me, and there are a number that can be adapted to Earthly use."

"Oh, those horrid things!" she exclaimed, remembering the blood-curdling story Princess Chen Chin had told her of the rock-throwing Martian pitcher-plants.

She had memories, too, of men and

equipment blown apart by the ferocious floribombs, and the slimy creeping of the Martian migrant moss.

"They are not all horrid," Winchester smiled. "There is one I think you are going to like—and need."

"Need? I can't imagine."

"It comes from Venus. They call it the Marionettal."

"A nettle! Ugh!"

"No, no. Not nettle," he corrected, slipping an arm around her. Marionettal. It is a fat little plant and smells good. But best of all, its fruit is peculiarly interesting. It resembles human puppets—comical, gro-

tesque figures. When you dry them, they make perfect dolls."

"So," she said, "you save the human race. Then you get wacky over the idea of having a couple of doll-bearing trees in the yard—"

"You are beautiful, angel, but dumb," he said, taking up a couple of notches in his grip. "If I'm any judge of the future—and I've been around in it quite a lot—in a couple of years, you're going to find those trees pretty darned handy."

"Oh, Allan," she said, when he let her breathe again, "you are so practical!"

Featured Next Issue

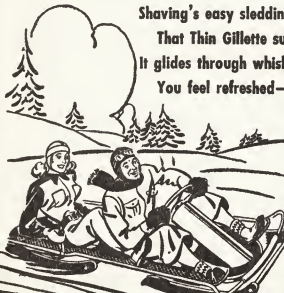
BLOOD ON THE SUN

An Amazing Complete Book-Length Novel of Interplanetary Conflict

By HAL K. WELLS



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Thrills in SCIENCE

Thumbnail Sketches of Great Men and Achievements

By OSCAR J. FRIEND

PLANET FIVE, SATELLITE FIVE

THE photographer looked in amazement at his prospective assistant. But he did not smile. This was obviously too serious a business for misplaced levity. Instead, swallowing his astonishment, he said gravely:

"So you wish to hire yourself out as my apprentice? You have references, of course?"

"Yes, sir," replied the applicant in a piping voice. "My father said I might do it."

"Ah, yes—your father," said the photographer solemnly. "Let me see now—what are your qualifications?"

"My name is Edward Emerson Barnard, and I am eight years old," answered the applicant quite a seriously. "I can do anything you tell me to do, sir."

"Well said," agreed the photographer, now smiling slightly. "And what do you intend doing with your salary?"

"I shall save it to buy a book on astronomy and a spyglass," was the prompt and positive answer.

"What? A star gazer right here in our midst in Nashville?"

"Yes, sir," replied young Barnard earnestly. "I am going to devote my life to the study of the heavens."

"Well, by gum!" muttered the amazed photographer under his breath. Then, aloud: "All right, young Mr. Galileo, by grabs, I'll hire you. And you can study the stars every night you want to from the roof of this building."

Thus, in 1865 in Nashville, Tennessee, was quietly launched the astronomical career of a man destined to reach out with telescope and photographic lens as one of the very first photographers to get the stars to sit for their portraits. Astronomy was already an ancient and venerable science, but telescopic photography was a brand new idea which was to change the very course of astronomical study.

Edward Emerson Barnard meant what he had said. Night after night he studied and mapped the heavens. At first his photographs were crude. Then, as his experience and knowledge grew along with his maturing mind and body, he began to make professional pictures of astral bodies which attracted national attention.

At the age of twenty, Barnard made two

great steps in his chosen career. He exchanged his spyglass for a small telescope, and he attended a lecture given in Nashville by Simon Newcomb, famous American astronomer. Newcomb became greatly in-



Edward Emerson Barnard

terested in the ardent young photographer of the skies and suggested that Barnard specialize in searching for comets.

Fired by the older man's praise, Barnard attacked his work with renewed zest. In

1887 he graduated from Vanderbilt University and knew his greatest thrill when, at the ripe age of thirty, he was appointed astronomer at the Lick Observatory in California.

Already renowned for having discovered sixteen comets and photographing numerous nebulae, in 1892 he made his greatest discovery. By now he had pretty thoroughly rounded out his education and, following in the footsteps of Galileo and Roemer, he devoted much of his time to the study of Jupiter, fifth child of the sun and mightiest of all the planets.

Having found that he did better photographic work with a small telescope, night after night saw him working with his six-inch telescope and camera in the very shadow of the great 36-inch refracting giant instrument. David scorning Goliath.

But not in vain!

For, on a cold and sparkling night, when Jupiter was in opposition to Earth and the sun, Barnard made an immortal discovery, the first discovery of its kind in nearly three hundred years.

He sighted—and photographed Jupiter's closest moon, Satellite V. A little planetoid of unknown diameter, at a distance of 112,500 miles from Jupiter, with a period of 11 hours and 57 minutes, Barnard discovered and trapped irrefutably on his

photographic plate.

His eyes sparkling with excitement, Edward Emerson Barnard rushed from the dark room where he had developed the plate and stared up at the vault of the stars. That he was to receive the Lalande gold medal of the French Academy of Sciences and many other honors for his indefatigable work and services meant nothing. All that mattered in this instant was the fact that he had corroborated Galileo's initial proof that the Solar System was heliocentric instead of geocentric.

The final death blow had been dealt to another false doctrine of ignorance.

"Satellite Five!" Barnard murmured. "The fifth moon of Jupiter—and I have discovered it! I wonder, are there any more?"

There were—four more. Satellites VI, VII, VIII, and IX, so tiny and far away as to be undiscoverable by the human eye, were all photographic discoveries—trapped and mapped by the use of the camera that Edward Emerson Barnard was instrumental in bringing into the field of astronomy. Thus, indirectly, Barnard was responsible for their discovery, and he lived to see this happen and to understand the vast field he had helped to open for the great science of astronomy.

MOVABLE TYPE

IT WAS a rather dusty and littered room, not too well lighted, and full of the smell of new paper and oil and ink. The creaking machine being operated by a red-faced and raw-boned man by means of a screw attachment was a quaint and queer apparatus of wood.

Only when a second man in knee breeches came forward to peel a sheet of paper from the bed of the machine—after the unscrewing operation—and exposed a rather crude print of a line drawing in one color of ink could one have recognized this scene as the workroom of a printery, and the creaking mechanism as a printing press.

For this was the year 1449, and the firm of Gutenberg, Dritzehn & Heilmann was engaged in the laborious business of printing and binding. Perhaps "printing" is the wrong word to use. In fact, the workers called it "drucken" themselves, a German word meaning pressure, compression, squeeze or stamp.

At two high tables, surrounded by quills and brushes and pots of ink and reams of paper, another pair of men were meticulously hand-lettering pages of text. Printing in that day meant printing by hand, after the manner of the old monks, reproducing mechanically from old wood blocks only the hand-carved illustrations to brighten the pages of the book under process of construction. An edition of fifty volumes was a stupendous work.

Johann Gutenberg, a scholarly man of fifty-one years of age, put down his pen and came over to look at the print taken from the groaning and complaining wood press.

"Ja," he said, nodding critically. "A good print, Andreas. We will need twenty-five of them for this job, so count them

carefully before you proceed to the next block."

Half to himself, Gutenberg added, "If we can print pictures, why is it not possible to print letters of the alphabet—the text matter of a book?"

But he knew the answer before he voiced the question. It was possible, but it meant the laborious hand-carving of a page of text, letter by letter, out of a block of hard wood. And when it was finished, it could only be used to print the same page, over and over, of the one work of literature it represented. There wasn't enough demand for any book to make this scheme practical. It would be more troublesome than to print a given number of duplicate pages by hand. There wasn't any volume.

Wasn't there? Yes, there was one book which had a circulation which might warrant such elaborate preparation. The Bible! This startling idea astonished the printer so greatly that he dropped the wood-cut print he was holding, smearing the wet ink hopelessly on the dusty floor.

"We still need twenty-five impressions,"

complained Dritzehn, who manipulated the screw of the press.

"I am sorry, Andreas," apologized Gutenberg, "but I just thought of something." He went on to explain his revolutionary idea, and his confreres laughed at him.

"Where, in all Germany," demanded Heilmann, "can we find enough wealthy burghers to buy a copy of even this Book to warrant a preparation of several hundred copies?"

But this idea was not so easily dismissed from the mind of Johann Gutenberg. He dreamed about it day and night. And finally, after the dissolution of his present partnership this same year, he went to the wealthy Johann Fust with his idea.

Thus it was that early in 1450 Johann Fust entered into a partnership with Johann Gutenberg and advanced him 800 guilders with which to start his new printery. By now Gutenberg's idea had expanded. He proposed the revolutionary idea of carving individual letters of the alphabet on the ends of little blocks of hard wood and then setting up the type much as a modern compositor does to make a page, even gluing the little blocks together if necessary.

Thus, if the Bible required, say, fifty thousand duplicates of the letter "E," he intended carving fifty thousand of them. After the designated number of prints had been made, instead of discarding the solid page of type as being useless, he could soak it apart and then use the individual letters all over again. It was upon this idea that he sold Johann Fust.

The idea, however, did not work out so well. Besides the terrific and lengthy labor of carving so many copies of each letter, he found that the pressure of the press split or crushed too many of the tiny wooden type. Fortunately, in starting this new venture, he had hired an assistant by the name of Peter Schöffer.

Schöffer was a young man of twenty-six, a journeyman printer from Gernsheim. He had had a youth of experience in a metal foundry. Intensely interested in Gutenberg's experiment, he went to the older printer with a suggestion.

"I think I have the solution, Herr Gutenberg," he said. "We will make your movable type out of metal."

Gutenberg blinked. He thought this over, not immediately seeing the improvement in this. If it took a long time to carve out wooden letters which wouldn't stand up, it would take much longer—perhaps a lifetime—to carve out metal ones which would serve. Nevertheless, he consented to let Schöffer experiment. The result was that the young printer cut only one set of the twenty-six letters of the alphabet on the ends of pieces of heavy metal. Then, using these master dies, in a block of softer metal he stamped many negatives of each letter.

Catching fire at this, Gutenberg melted down and mixed the first type metal ever used and poured it into these negative molds. When these bits of molten metal had hardened, he had as many positive type slugs as Peter Schöffer had stamped dies.

It settled down now to a routine business of casting type.

As soon as enough letters were on hand, Gutenberg composed the first stick of type. When they set it up in a frame, making the first form, and operated the old hand press, they struck off the first page of type the



Gutenberg

modern world had ever seen. It was, in spite of imperfections and typographical errors, a great success. The first page of the Gutenberg Bible had come from the press. A new era in the written word had dawned.

From that press came the unprecedented edition of nearly three hundred copies! Of that huge number only forty-five copies are known to be in existence today. But the pioneering had again been done for another great invention of mankind. Another milestone in the march of progress had been passed. Gutenberg and Schöffer had invented movable metal type and advanced the inexpensive dissemination of knowledge a thousandfold.

Editor's Note: There has been much argument as to the proper placing of credit for this invention—Holland, France, Italy and Germany all claiming the honor. In actual fact, printing from movable type was first done by Pi Shêng in China in the years 1041 to 1049, but because of the large numbers of characters in what in Chinese corresponds to an alphabet, the new method was not generally adopted. The work of Gutenberg and Schöffer developed independently of the earlier Chinese discovery.

(Turn Page)

ALADDIN'S LAMP

A TYPICAL Swiss home in the suburbs of Geneva. Neat hand-woven curtains bordered the windows. A rug woven on a hand loom covered the living-room floor. A cheerful log fire crackled softly on the stone hearth where a tea-kettle on the hob whispered a gentle aria in steamy vapor. On the mantelpiece a clock ticked merrily away. The only other sound in the room was the faint scratching noise of a quill pen.

Aimé Argand was busy again with his numbers and equations. Destined to be a physician of some renown, he was already becoming known as a mathematician and chemist at the age of twenty-six. And night after night he strained his eyes studying away under the soft glow of a yellow, flickering tongue of an oil lamp.

There was a sudden click in the mechanism of the clock, a *whirr* of wheels and springs, and a tiny door opened in its face to emit a tiny wooden bird who said, "Cuckoo!" once to announce the half-hour and then withdrew as abruptly as a sentinel on guard duty.

Aimé laid down his pen, straightened and yawned.

"Nine-thirty," he murmured aloud as he rubbed his reddened eyes and then stared a bit moodily at the flickering flame which rose from the oil-filled base of dainty china on the table before him. "The days are too short. If only I had better light to work by at night."

He couldn't arise and switch on an electric light or even ignite a gas-burning mantle, and it was not a matter of financial distress. For it was the year 1781, and there was no better illumination than tallow candles or flickering oil wicks which drew up oil by capillary attraction.

"Why haven't scientists given more thought to the improvement of light?" the young chemist asked himself in amazement. "They have discovered and invented thousands of useful things—and we still grope about after sundown as blind and helpless as the first caveman with his flaming pine torch. I wonder . . . well, I shall do something about it myself!"

Yawning again, Aimé blew out the lamp, banked the fire, and went to bed.

The next day in his little laboratory he began tinkering with the idea of a different combustion technique. Johann, his younger brother, a lad quite interested in Aimé's chemical research, mixed and filtered a simple compound as he eyed his older brother curiously.

Aimé was deep in thought. The yellow flame, he knew, was yellow because of incomplete combustion. Chemistry had already taught him that combustible substances required oxygen with which to burn. Now, if only he could run a hollow tube up through a candlewick to sort of pipe oxygen to the inside of the flame, wouldn't that insure greater combustion? No—that wouldn't work. But that was along the right line of thought. It was the correct ideal!

He began experimenting with some pieces of brass tubing he had there, fitting one circle inside the other, making a sort of sleeve valve as he speculated and stared off through the window at the snow-clad

Alps. Johann became so interested that he forgot what he was doing and whirled to approach. His elbow overturned a glass flask, breaking it in two neatly at the neck base.

"For shame, clumsy Johann!" reproved Aimé. "You know how much those Austrian glass blowers charge for flasks."

"I'm sorry, Aimé," replied his brother, ruefully handling the two broken pieces and then setting them on the back of the work table. "But what are you doing there?"

"I'm not yet sure," responded Aimé, going on to explain his dream of better light. "Here, Johann, take this piece of inner tubing and go down to Mrs. Kohler's—the wick maker—and ask her to knit for me a tubular lamp wick which will fit around this tube like a—like a sort of sock."

The days passed while Aimé tinkered with his tubular wick idea. Then came the day when he assembled his contraption of concentric rings with a crude sort of mechanism to feed up the circular wick as it charred away. The wick maker had supplied a neat tubular wick, the first of its kind, and the invention was at last ready to set upon a lamp base of oil for a test.

Once thought out and explained, the theory was simple. The idea was to supply oxygen to both the inside and outside of the wick at the same time, thus insuring better combustion and creating a brighter light. With Aimé's contraption, there was no doubt that air could get to both sides of his oil-impregnated wick at once.

Not without considerable eager trembling, Aimé lighted his new type wick. It flickered, guttered, flamed up—and then burned with a smooth, even ring of light. But Aimé groaned in disappointment.

It was a better flame than that of the old lamps, yes—because it was bigger. There was more wick aflame at the same time. But the light was still yellow as before. There was no better combustion.

"I can't understand it, Johann," said the inventor, giving up his futile adjustments at length. "Theoretically, it should work. I've doubled the wick's capacity for oxygen, and there's plenty of air in this room, but it just won't use it."

"It's like leading a stubborn horse to water," agreed his brother. "You can't make him drink."

Idly Johann picked up the neck of the flask he had accidentally broken days before. Noting that its circular mouth was

a trifle larger than the circumference of Aimé's discarded lamp wick, he carelessly slipped the glass cylinder down over the still burning wick.

Lo and behold! As though he had applied the magic touch of Aladdin's genie to the lamp, the flame of the wick paled in color, leaped higher, and doubled in intensity of light. It startled Johann so that he nearly dropped the whole thing.

"Aimé! Look!" he cried, his voice breaking. "What—what—?"

But Aimé was already looking, his keen mind already leaping to the answer.

"The chimney, Johann!" he exclaimed. "You did it with a lamp chimney! You created a forced draft—like the chimney of a fireplace! The draft forces the inner side of the wick to take more oxygen. Johann, we've made the first improvement on lamps in three thousand years!"

"With a knitted lamp sock and the neck

of a broken flask," murmured Johann in awe.

And then both brothers began to laugh, but there was awe and scientific respect in their laughter.

For it was so. In applying the first lamp chimney in history, Johann Argand had supplied the last item necessary to make Aimé's lamp work—and the Argand lamp for better lighting had now become a reality. A new day of light had dawned. Aladdin's lamp, indeed!

Editor's Note: Nearly a century later, Murdock, the pioneer of gas-lighting, was to adapt the Argand idea of two concentric, circular pipes in the design of gas-burners. Bunsen was to apply the same principle to his famous burner. The same general idea was to be applied to the oxyacetylene torch, and a hundred other tools and inventions of mankind. But the initial honor belongs to those two brothers with the first home-made circular lamp wick and extemporaneous chimney in that Geneva home in 1781.



Coming in the Next Issue

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By HENRY KUTTNER

Author of "Reverse Atom," "Remember Tomorrow," etc.

*A Superhuman Being Shackles Two Mortals in a Private World Where
Only Thought-Power Can Triumph!*



Eleanor and I sat together on the ancient sofa and waited for our host to return.

"This place gives me the creeps, Barney," she said.

"It's just one of the old mansions on Riverside Drive," I told her. "We'll push off soon."

Our host, John Deering, came back with a decanter and glasses. He was handsome, in a colorless, soft sort of way, and almost pitifully eager to be hospitable.

"We can't stay long—" I began.

"Please," he said, in a cultured, gentle voice. "You've been of great service to me. At least let me offer you a drink."

There was nothing to do but accept. It was good brandy, and I leaned back beside Eleanor as I drank it, watching the light from an old-fashioned prism chandelier glint on her hair.

Deering's gratitude had been profuse enough to be embarrassing. Far too great for the service involved. Eleanor and I had been parked by the Hudson—for it was a moonlit night, and we were engaged—and I'd stepped out of the car to investigate a man who was bent over the railing, apparently ill. He'd managed to give me his card, explaining that he was suffering a heart attack, and we'd driven him to his home. That was all there had been to it.

Now Deering twirled his glass and watched us.

"I don't look sick, do I?" he asked, smiling. Well, my work is pretty hard. I'm a scientist."

Eleanor's brown eyes glowed.

"A scientist?"

"Or inventor. I'll show you, later, if you wish." He hesitated. "I hope you won't think I'm intrusive, but—" His gaze fastened on Eleanor's ring. "May I congratulate you, Mr. Corbett?"

"Thanks," I said.

He stared at us. "You're in love. Well—" He drank brandy and then said a curious thing. "Emotional values are so unpredictable in humans."

The way he said it sent a sudden, cold shiver down my spine. *Humans*—as though he referred to some race vastly different from his own. An odd thought, which I dismissed immediately.

Deering got up. "Let me show you my invention. It may amuse you."

He seemed pathetically eager to show his gratitude. I felt vaguely uncomfortable.

But, without offending Deering, we could not leave just yet.

Eleanor squeezed my arm. "Come along, Barney. I'm curious."

SO we followed Deering down a flight of steps into the basement. He opened a door in the wall, and we found ourselves entering a cement-walled room that held nothing at all but a—what?

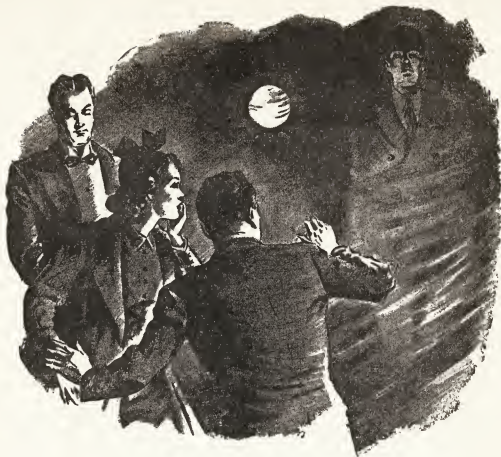
I stared.

It hung unsupported in the air, four feet above the floor, a glowing sphere that somehow hurt my eyes. It was no larger than my head, and shone with a pale, white phosphorescence. Yet over its surface motion crawled. It seemed alive.

Its movement was that of the sea, interminable, unpredictable — a nd strange!

"What on earth—" Eleanor said.

Deering leaned against the wall, smiling.



Facing me was a complete replica of myself

"Go ahead. Touch it."

I extended my hand. It was stopped a few inches from the ball's surface, as though by an invisible wall.

I swept my hand under the thing, and over it. No wires, no glass supports.

"What holds it up?" I asked Deering. "Magnets?"

He shook his head. "It's rather complicated. You can't touch it, because it exists in another space-time continuum. Another plane of existence, that is."

"What is the thing?" Eleanor asked. She was admiring the way her ring sparkled in the gleams from the shining sphere.

"Call it a thought materializer." Deering still smiled, but I thought that his eyes were watchful. "It works on the principle of any amplifier. If you had sufficient will power, Mr. Corbett, you could create material objects by merely thinking."

Eleanor glanced at me. Was our host—slightly batty?

"Name a flower," Deering said.

I said, "A rose," just as Eleanor said, "A lily."

Our host nodded. He went to a wall and opened a door I had not seen. Behind it was nothing but a tall, deep alcove lined with a substance like black glass. The floor was of the same material, and on it lay what looked like a helmet, covered with wires so tiny and closely woven that they resembled cloth.

Deering placed the helmet on his head.

A wire, ending in a metal plug, dangled from it. He closed the door, inserted the plug into a socket in the wall, then flicked open a transparent panel in the door.

"Watch."

Eleanor and I peered into the alcove. Abruptly we heard a moaning whirr from behind us. I glanced back. That

incredible ball of light was spinning like a tiny world.

Deering's eyes were closed. Trickle of opalescent brightness ran across the surface of his helmet. And light played over the walls of the alcove.

Suddenly, through the panel, I saw a thin mist forming. It coalesced, assuming outlines that were vaguely familiar. Inchoate, tenuous, the ghost of a flower was there beyond the glass—a lily.

It was three-dimensional and real! Incredibly it lay there. And, beside it, another fog thickened into the form of a rose.

The light drifting over the walls faded and was gone. I met Eleanor's eyes and read stark incredulity in them.

A trick?

DEERING opened the door. He picked up the flowers and handed them to Eleanor.

They looked perfectly normal, and were quite fresh.

"How the devil did you do that?" I said weakly.

Deering grinned. "The machine concentrated my thoughts—amplified them," he said.

For the life of me I couldn't figure out where the flowers had come from.

"You mean—you created them?"

Deering nodded. "Yes, I created them, Mr. Corbett. Indian fakirs can do the same—sometimes."

"Hypnotism?" I hazarded.

"I'm not hypnotizing you. Anyway, just what is hypnotism? Making you see something that isn't there?"

"Yes—"

"Not quite. You can be hypnotized into smelling, tasting, feeling, hearing, as well as seeing. If you're made to believe you're being burned with a hot iron, you'll develop a blister. If the iron were real, what more could it do?"

He had me there, of course. Still I was unconvinced. Deering smiled and went on:

"Some people do have strong mental power. Hypnotism is a form of it. It's a way of creating matter. Usually that can be done only briefly, but—well, those flowers are permanent. My machine made them real by focusing my

thoughts. I visualized them—there they are."

Eleanor smell the rose. "It's here, all right."

"You're difficult to convince," Deering said. "Look here." He closed his eyes.

I heard Eleanor gasp. My gaze turned from our host. A shock of sheer amazement paralyzed me.

Deering had closed the alcove's door. Through the panel I saw the familiar play of light on the walls, and a glowing fog that thickened even as I watched.

It became—*Eleanor!*

Deering opened the door. Eleanor, with a quick intake of breath, gripped my arm.

"Barney!" she said. "Oh!"

"Please don't be alarmed," our host said. "Your double is mindless—a robot. She hasn't any initiative, any intelligence. Watch. He turned to the thing. "Come forward," he ordered.

The—creature—walked forward, and stopped at Deering's command. It was identical with Eleanor in every detail.

And, somehow, I felt a hot tide of anger. For this was subtly repugnant, as though my fiancée had been insulted.

"Wait a minute, Deering," I said.

He looked at me. "Oh—I'm sorry. I forgot your natural reaction. But this is no more human than a wax dummy."

"It's alive."

"Without intelligence. Without emotions. It's a flesh-and-blood robot. You see, Mr. Corbett, all bodies are composed of electrons, setting up an individual atomic pattern in each case. If free electrons are arranged in the particular pattern of *you*, an exact double is created. The building blocks of matter are all around us. My machine simply focuses and concentrates my mental picture of a flower, or a human being. You've a familiar example in the pantagraph. It makes exact copies, just as my device makes copies three-dimensionally."

INTEREST was beginning to submerge my anger.

"You can coin a fortune with this

thing! You can make gold—jewels—anything! If they're real— Why, you could make an army of robots!"

Deering shook his head. "No one can command them but I. Try it."

I didn't like the idea, somehow. Eleanor finally told the creature that was her double to close its eyes, but there was no response.

Deering nodded toward the alcove. "I don't even need that focusing apparatus. It makes my task easier, but the real heart of the machine is that sphere. Look!"

In the empty air before me, a thin fog sprang into being. It swirled and thickened like a nebula. It looked like the ghostly shadow of a man.

Suddenly I seemed to be looking into a mirror. Facing me was a perfect replica of myself. Complete, down to the last detail of clothing!

Deering's pale, handsome face was expressionless. Only his eyes glowed into mine.

I felt a cold shock. Icy fingers seemed to be reaching into my brain. My body was suddenly paralyzed.

Unconsciousness? No—for I heard Deering's voice. Yet I couldn't move, couldn't lift a finger.

"You will obey," he said.

My mind felt like a caged bird fluttering against bars. I couldn't think.

"You will obey," the voice out of blackness went on. "You cannot betray me. When you attempt to tell anyone who or what I am, when you attempt to get help against me, you will be unable to do so. Remember! Now—sleep."

After that—darkness indeed. . . .

I woke up in Eden.

That isn't figurative, by any means. When I opened my eyes, I was lying on cloverlike grass under a tree, and Eleanor was beside me, asleep. What first impressed me, I think, was the sky. It wasn't blue. It was a soft golden hue, cloudless and without depth. I wondered if I had not been transported to another world.

Certainly the scene around me justified such a surmise. The grass on which I lay held a bluish tint, and was mosslike. The tree—

Its leaves, too, were bluish, and the fruit hung in blushing clusters of

rose-and-yellow spheres, larger than peaches.

I stood up. I was on a hill-top. A clear brook of crystalline water near me ran downhill to vanish in the grass. All around grew the trees, innumerable varieties of which I had never heard.

The hill was—walled! What I had taken for the sky was, in reality, something like a great golden bowl that prisoned us. The golden wall was unbroken, rising to a dome overhead.

Eleanor was awakening. I remembered Deering. He had done this to us, somehow. Hypnotized us, transported us here. But where was "here"?

ELEANOR'S eyes opened. She saw the strange sky, and with a little gasp reached for me. My arms went around her, and we sat for a while silent, taking comfort in each other's nearness.

"Barney," she said at last, "what's happened?"

"The last I remember was Deering hypnotizing me," I said.

Her brown eyes widened as she saw our strange little world. "But—I don't understand."

The last Eleanor remembered, it seemed, was Deering's voice telling her to sleep. But what had happened in the interim neither she nor I could imagine.

"We can't be still in his house," I said. "That's obvious."

Idly I reached up and plucked one of the rosy fruits. Its flesh was sweetly succulent.

"We're the only people here," Eleanor said. "We can see all over our private world."

I nodded toward the wall.

"Shall we explore?"

Purposely I showed no excitement, realizing that Eleanor might be near hysteria, and with good cause! Together we went down the hill, through the grove beside the streamlet. It was clear, sweet water, we found.

Clusters of fruit hung like moons above us. Beyond, the golden sky was changeless and eternal. It was Eden, indeed.

But it was silent. No birds piped in the branches. There was not even a

trace of insect life. Eleanor and I might have been the only living beings on Earth.

Not even Adam and Eve had been so—alone!

We reached the golden wall. I stared at it in wonder. It was made of some substance that was smooth as plastic. I reached out to touch it—and my hand sank into the wall as though it had been fog!

It was an illusion—not real. I felt suddenly exultant. With a cry I leaped forward, right through the wall, and stood blinded momentarily by the glare of sunlight. A cool, fresh wind blew on my face.

The ground sloped down through aisles of green trees—familiar, Earthly trees—to a metal fence. Beyond was a highway, on which automobiles were passing.

"We're all right now, Eleanor," I said, glancing aside. But she wasn't there.

Fear struck through me. I turned, and the golden wall was gone. I looked at a flat, bare plain stretching for perhaps a mile before the trees began again. There was nothing on the plain—nothing!

"Eleanor!" I cried, and my shout came out a whisper.

I stumbled forward, and suddenly under my feet was soft grass. The sky was once more a golden bowl. The hill of strange trees loomed, and Eleanor, her cheeks wet with frightened tears, was in my arms.

"Barney! Barney!"

The wall was behind me once more, golden and cryptic, shutting out the familiar terrestrial landscape.

"You can walk right through it," I said. "There's a highway down the slope a bit. Come along."

She shook her head. "I can't! I saw you vanish into the wall and tried to follow—but I couldn't!"

I shook my head. "But if I can—"

A GAIN I tested the wall with my hand. Eleanor put her hand beside mine. She couldn't seem to penetrate the barrier.

I gripped her wrist and tried to force it forward. But now the wall was real and solid.

"You're hurting me," she said. "It's no use, Barney. I tried—"

But we didn't give up until it became quite evident that I could pass through the wall, and she couldn't. After circumnavigating the entire inner side of the wall, we realized that it was an impassable barrier—to Eleanor only.

What next?

"You've got to leave me, Barney. Get help. The police, or—or somebody."

"Leave you here?" I looked around.

"I'll be safe enough. There's nothing here to hurt me."

That was true. We could see all over our private world. It was empty. Food and drink were there in plenty. But there was no other life than ourselves.

I didn't want to leave Eleanor, but it was the only way. So at last I went out through the golden wall, with a sick, horrible feeling, and the memory of her white, frightened face tearing at my heart.

Then behind me was no hill and no Eleanor, just the bare, arid plain. I hurried down the slope and reached the highway in five minutes.

My own car was there, parked beside the road.

That gave me a decided shock. The door was locked, but on investigation I found the key in my pocket. The Hudson River—I guessed it was the Hudson—was across the road, so I turned south. I had to get help in a hurry.

At a small town I drew up beside a policeman who was directing traffic. His ruddy face turned questioningly to me.

"Yeah? What can I do for you?"

I opened my mouth, but didn't say anything. I wanted to tell him what had happened. I wanted to ask him to get help, to come back with me to where Eleanor waited—and I couldn't say a word!

Instead, I suddenly remembered Deering's hypnotic command: "You cannot betray me. When you attempt to get help, you will be unable to do so. . . ."

The whole thing was impossible. Deering *couldn't* fetter my tongue. I

need only say a few words, and the authorities would do the rest. A few words—and I couldn't say them.

The officer was staring.

"Well?"

He leaned forward and sniffed suspiciously.

"Is—is this the New York road?" I asked at last, and had no difficulty in forming those words.

"Sure. Straight ahead, through Yonkers."

I drove on, my thoughts a chaos. How could I get help, if I couldn't talk? Well, I could write! I parked and drew out notebook and pencil.

I made meaningless scrawls. Deering's hypnotic command was far too strong for me. Every time I tried to betray him, I found myself up against an impassable mental barrier, as strong as the golden wall that prisoned Eleanor.

IT took several trials before I was convinced. But, at last, I was in upper Manhattan, heading for Deering's home. That, at least, was possible to me.

I reached the mansion and got out. The old-fashioned knocker banged under my hand. The door opened, and Deering pallidly handsome, smiling a little, stepped back, holding a gun aimed at my heart.

"Come in," he invited. "I expected you."

Deering gestured me into the drawing room where we had sat the night before.

"Sit down and relax. First of all, Corbett, understand this. Your fiancée is in no danger. She won't be harmed. Neither will you."

"But you may be," I said.

He laughed and gestured negligently with the gun.

"Oh, sit down. Don't be melodramatic. I've an explanation to make, and it may as well be made in comfort."

"What did you do to us?" Somehow my voice wasn't quite as steady now. Deering's quiet confidence shook my own.

"I own that property on the Hudson," he said. "Where you left Miss Dunn. I've prepared all this long ago.

That hill under the golden dome was created by me, with the aid of my machine. I made it last night."

"Made it?"

"Well—I made flowers, didn't I? And robot humans? It was no more difficult to imagine an Eden and an impassable wall surrounding it. Impassable for your fiancée, that is."

"Just what was your idea?"

He smiled a little. "An experiment. You see, that hill is, in a way, a conservatory, like a hot-house under glass. From outside it's invisible. And, to anyone but you, the golden wall is impassable. No one can get in, and Eleanor Dunn can't get out. The point is, Corbett"—he hesitated—"I'm not *homo sapiens*. Not human at all."

I stared. Deering extended a well manicured hand and glanced at it briefly.

"Remember how I made those robot bodies last night? Well, this body of mine was made artificially, too. As I say, I'm not human. My home is on a planet revolving around the star you call Algol. My natural shape isn't palpable at all."

My incredulity must have been obvious.

"I came to Earth to study your race, Corbett. Ours is highly intelligent. We conquered interstellar travel long ago. We're evolved far beyond your own civilization. We are beings of pure thought-essence, in our natural forms. However, on our world, we needed a servant race, and we had one, adapted to our needs and trained over a period of centuries. But, lately, it became too decadent for our use. Expeditions were sent out to various planets to find another race suitable for our requirements. If human beings prove satisfactory, we'll send a fleet of space-ships to convey enough men and women to Algol to start a new servant race."

"You're crazy!" I said.

"Wait a bit. My job here is almost done. Naturally, I had to investigate humans thoroughly. But this experiment is the last. When it's completed, I'm going back to Algol. But when I first reached your planet, I decided I needed human shape. It would make my investigations easier. I made a

robot"—he touched his chest—"and entered it. That enabled me to live among humans as a human, but it also handicapped me."

THE word made me look up sharply. I glanced away immediately, but Deering had seen.

"That won't help you. You see, in my own shape, I need no machine to materialize my thoughts. But, as a human, I do. Without my thought-device I'm just as vulnerable as you are." He saw my muscles tense, and lifted the gun warningly. "Don't misunderstand me. This body may be hurt without harming the real me. Only one thing can destroy my life."

"What?" I asked the question with no expectation of an answer, but to my surprise I got one.

"Electricity. But I take care to stay away from anything of that sort."

It showed how confident he was—to tell me that!

"You can't be vulnerable while you have that machine in the cellar," I said.

"Its powers are limited. All its strength now is being used to maintain the world-sector under the golden dome. But I shan't further need to use the machine now, and, since I'll be leaving your world soon, I'll not need to build another. I need no supernatural powers now. Everything was planned carefully in advance, from the first moment I met you by the Hudson."

"You planned that, eh?"

"Yes. My attack of illness was a trick, designed to get you both here."

"But why us?"

He shrugged. "It might have been any young couple who were in love. You came along and fitted into my plans. The reason? Well, as I said, I've been charting and surveying the human race. I need only one more factor. Emotional values. We of Algol are emotionless. I want to find out just how important such a biological factor as love can be."

I felt hot anger. "Well?"

"You can join Eleanor Dunn—forever—in her prison, or you can take up your life again without her."

"Just what the hell do you mean?"

"When you go through the golden wall again, it will thicken into a prison for you, too. You will stay there until you die, with your fiancée. You'll have plenty to eat and drink. And you'll have each other. But there will be no other life."

My lips were dry. Deering went on:

"That's one choice—forget the girl and go on without her. She'll be lost to you forever, of course—"

"Damn you!" I said.

He lifted a hand. "This is an experiment with me. An experiment dealing with emotions. I know that men will fight and die to save their mates, but many men believe in an after life. So death is not hard to face. But a completely sterile existence may be. You must decide, then, whether you are willing to give up everything else for this girl."

MY mind was chaotic. I loved Eleanor, and she loved me. But if the two of us were locked up in a sterile Eden, would that love last? Day upon unending day of utter sameness. Perhaps we would come to loathe one another, without any outside interests at all—living the lives of animals, feeding, sleeping. No, not animals. We would be tortured by memories and hopes.

"This is inhuman," I said unsteadily.

Deering nodded. "I'm not human."

"You can't get away with it!"

"I've taken precautions. Last night I examined your minds and got what knowledge I needed—where you live, and so on. If you decide to join the girl, I shall make use of your robot doubles. I'll give them guns, command them to go to your homes, and destroy themselves. It will appear suicide, since they are perfect dummies."

I didn't answer. A thought had come to me. Why had Deering taken this precaution? Because he feared our disappearance might be traced to him?

Yet what could harm him?

Anything—while he was still in human shape, and without the use of the thought-materializer.

"Listen," I said. "I've about fifteen thousand bucks in the bank. Can't I—"

Deering's pallid face did not change. "Why should I want money? I made all I needed, and I'll be leaving Earth as soon as you've made your decision. It will take me a week or so to build the apparatus for releasing my real self from this body, but I've enough money for that equipment." He shrugged. "You must make your decision. Join the girl, or live without her."

My mind went back to that Eden, a world of wonder under a golden sky. A small world—but it held Eleanor. And would hold her till the day she died.

Two of us, a man and a woman, living without any outside contacts, in utter sterility. . . .

I remembered that Adam and Eve had left Eden.

"Okay," I said suddenly. "I've decided."

"What?" Deering leaned forward, interested. I longed to get my hands on his gun, but I knew that bullets couldn't kill that inhuman thing. And Eleanor would still be a prisoner. . . .

"I'll go back," I said.

Deering expelled his breath in a long sigh. "Well, that decision completes my survey of Earth." He glanced at me sharply. "I don't intend to relent. You must go through with it."

"I know," I said, standing up.

He left me at the door. I drove off, turned into a side street and parked. For an idea was glimmering in my mind. Deering had taken every precaution, but he wasn't invulnerable. There might be a chance. A desperate one, but I was desperate.

As soon as I went back to Eleanor, the golden wall would close permanently behind me. Well, I wasn't going back—not just yet.

Instead, I returned to Deering's mansion.

It was a rickety old place, and I anticipated little difficulty in effecting an entrance, unless burglar alarms had been installed. Luckily, they hadn't been. Deering had been very confident. I prayed he wouldn't discover

me here until I'd finished the job I had to do.

THE room I entered, through a window I pried open, was dusty and unused. I tiptoed to the door and gently opened it. Where was Deering? A crackling sound of fire made me tiptoe along the hall to the room where we had talked. Deering was there, burning papers in a fireplace. Destroying all traces of his task on Earth.

He didn't hear me. I went back, found the door to the cellar, and gingerly descended the ancient steps. Once they creaked under my weight, and I froze for a moment, but there was no alarm.

The cellar was, as I remembered, cluttered with empty packing-boxes which had once been filled with scientific equipment. The two doubles stood motionless against the wall, dimly visible in light that filtered in through a dusty window. My heart hurt at sight of that staring, familiar figure that was Eleanor in everything but mind.

On an impulse, I went to the inner door and opened it. The phosphorescent sphere still hung suspended in air. If I could only destroy it! But I couldn't even touch the thing, existing as it did in another continuum.

I found a crowbar and went back to the doubles. Eleanor's duplicate I ignored. My own figure I examined carefully. It even breathed. That made it shockingly difficult when I lifted the crowbar and smashed it down on the thing's head. The results were—well, up to expectations.

Feeling sick, I dragged the now limp dummy behind a packing box, covering it with sacks. There were no stains on the floor. I took the robot's place beside Eleanor—and waited.

I waited a hundred years, it seemed.

It was the hardest, most grueling task I had ever undertaken in my life. I was impersonating a robot, mindless and soulless. More than ever I was conscious of the innumerable distractions that always keep one from remaining perfectly motionless. My nose itched. My throat was dry. My skin crawled and was damp with per-

spiration. Would Deering's eyes fathom the trick I was playing upon him?

A door opened. Footsteps sounded on the stairs. Deering came into view, a gun in each hand.

I forced myself to stand motionless, my eyes unblinking.

Deering did not even glance at the packing case that hid the ruined robot, though my eyes ached to turn in that direction. He put one gun in my pocket, one in the other figure's purse.

He spoke clearly and distinctly. "You already have your directions. Go to the places I told you, wait till you are alone, then shoot yourselves in the head. Here are the keys to the two apartments."

He gave them to us—Eleanor's key and my own, stolen from our pockets last night.

"Now go."

The robot figure beside me stirred. It walked forward and up the stairs. I followed, conscious of Deering's eyes on my back.

He opened the front door for us, closed it, and I walked along the street in company with a living robot.

The robot turned left. I followed, but at the first corner halted. The dummy walked on. I knew it would go to Eleanor's apartment and kill itself.

I GOT in my car, after a hurried half-block walk, and drove hurriedly to my lawyer's office. I didn't know how much time I had, but now that my plan was started, I had to carry it through.

My attorney was startled when I told him I wished to change my will immediately. I rushed him through the procedure. It took less than twenty minutes.

I left all my possessions to Eleanor Dunn. I stipulated that, should she predecease me, the legacy would go to John Deering. His card was still in my pocket, and I verified the address by that.

Then I went out and telephoned the police.

"This is Barney Corbett," I said. "You don't know the name, but I'm going to be murdered. See my at-

torney. He'll know about it."

I made no mention of Deering, and purposely kept my mind from him. So I was able to talk without a mental block on my tongue.

After that I got in my car and raced hell-bent up the Hudson.

I got out at the place I remembered, walked up the slope, and stopped at the edge of the bare plain. I stepped through the invisible barrier. And Eleanor was running to meet me down the hill of magic.

"It's all right, darling," I said, holding her tightly.

Gingerly I reached out behind me and touched the golden wall. It was solid. I was imprisoned with Eleanor in Eden. Forever.

Forever?

It was a little time before I was able to tell her what I'd done. I wouldn't let her leave this spot, beside the barrier. We sat down on the soft grass and I talked.

"The police will get in touch with my attorney," I said. "He'll be suspicious, because of the new will, and send them to Deering's place. They'll find what looks like my body, murdered, and hidden in the cellar. They'll know I left my money to you, look for you—and find that you're presumably dead. It'll be your robot double, of course, but they won't know that."

Eleanor bit her lips. "What good will that do, Barney?"

"It'll pin a murder rap on Deering, that's all."

"But if he's superhuman—"

"He isn't—that's just it. Without his thought-machine, he's just as human and vulnerable as we are. And it'd take him a week to build a device to free his intelligence from the body he created for it."

"They can't kill him, though."

"Electricity will kill him. He admitted that. Know what happens to murderers in this state, darling? They get a big jolt of electricity."

"But how will that help us?"

"Deering doesn't want to die. But without the thought-materializer, he's vulnerable."

"He'll use it."

"I hope so," I said grimly. "At

present, all its powers are being used to maintain our own private hell. If he uses it, 'Eden' stops existing. That's how I figure it, anyway. Now all we can do is wait."

SO we waited, for hours upon hours, it seemed. Behind us the hill of enchantment rose, exotic, alien, alluring. The brooklet sang, chuckling as it fled down the slope. Yes—it was Eden.

Then, without warning, the golden

My car was waiting. We fled back toward New York. I kept one arm about Eleanor, holding her close. The sun went down beyond the Hudson before we crossed the Harlem River.

I anticipated trouble with the police. I was questioned, yes, but by baffled and incredulous men. The police had found my double's body, and the corpse of what was apparently Eleanor Dunn. They had arrested John Deering. He had broken free, fled to the cellar, and locked himself

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wall vanished like a dream. Before us stretched the familiar Earthly landscape, and the highway beyond. We plunged forward, racing on leaden feet, down to the fence, past it, to the road.

Once we looked back. The hill of dreams was gone. Only a flat, arid plain was there in its stead.

"Deering used the machine to save himself," I said. "That diverted its powers from its other use. Long enough for us to escape, anyway."

in. When the door was battered in, they found his body, a bullet lodged in the brain.

I guessed that it wasn't Deering's body they had found. It was a double—a robot—created by him with the aid of his thought-materializer. With the attention of the police momentarily diverted, he had managed to escape, taking his machine with him. That could not have been difficult, once the incredible powers of the device were again his to command.

But, in order to use it, to save himself, he had been forced to free Eleanor and me from our prison.

The police were baffled by the disappearance of the three corpses. They had simply vanished—into thin air, as one frightened patrolman contended. I knew who was responsible for that.

Somehow I straightened matters out. We had committed no crime. And, finally, we were released, with admonitions.

We were married within the week.

That ended the affair, with one small postscript. It was a letter that arrived one morning, mailed from a small town in South Dakota. Here it is:

Dear Mr. Corbett:

I'm writing to reassure you. You won't see "John Deering" again, for by the time you get this, I shall have left Earth in my true shape. I imagine you may fear a continuation of the experiment, however. You need have no such fear. You outwitted me, very cleverly. But I did not tell you the true purpose of my scheme. It was not to test emotional reaction at all. I was testing the intelligence of an ordinary human specimen. The whole affair was an apparently insoluble problem, and I wished to discover

how the logic of *homo sapiens* would be applied to it. You solved the problem, neatly and cleverly, and incidentally gave me the data I needed on human intelligence. Your race is far too logical to be used as the servants of we of Algol. We will find material elsewhere, on some other planet, and in some less intelligent race. So my task on Earth is finished, and you need not fear that I, or any of my people, will ever return.

JOHN DEERING.

So, with receipt of that letter, the last shadow of doubt was lifted. Eleanor and I are married and rather incredibly happy. There's only one small thing.

"When you came back, you knew we'd both get out of that prison," Eleanor told me, a little while ago. "So you really didn't make the decision Deering wanted. Suppose you'd have known there was no way of getting out. What would you have done?"

There was only one answer to that, of course. And I gave it. But Eleanor shouldn't have asked me such a question.

For somehow, now, I can't help wondering. . . .

Next Issue

THE EARTH-SAVER

By JOSEPH J. MILLARD



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THE HELICOPTER

Editor, SCIENCE QUESTION BOX:

Is the idea of vertical flight practical, or is it just a dream of science fiction writers?—A. L., Jamaica, L. I.

Not only is the helicopter principle practical, it is already a *fait accompli*. Not many years ago the Beechnut Company sent a combination helicopter and forward propeller plane on a tour of the United States. You may have seen this craft with the revolving upper wing. Since 1900, numerous inventors have turned their attention to this problem.

The famous plane designer, Igor Sikorsky, has worked on the problem of vertical flight

since 1908. In April, 1940, at his plant in Bridgeport, Connecticut, Sikorsky gave a public demonstration of a helicopter that could lift vertically from the ground, hover in the air, fly backward, forward or sideward, or turn completely around in the air while remaining directly above a designated spot. The present decade will undoubtedly see a rapid development of his branch of aeronautics.

TEUTONIC DUST BOWLS

Editor, SCIENCE QUESTION BOX:

Is it true that Germany is afflicted with dust bowls comparable to our?—J. K., Tulsa, Okla.

Yes. In her desperate attempt to increase her food supplies, Germany has, since the beginning of the Nazi regime, undertaken a wholesale clean-up of swamps and bogs, the clearing of wild lands and the improvement of streams, all with the view to cultivation.

Since 1938, German summers have been sin-

gularly dry. The result has been, on a lesser scale, dust storms and wind erosions which, in the relatively smaller area of the Third Reich, may prove serious. It is serious enough, with no little soil to spare, that steps are being taken to combat this man-made disease of the soil.

END OF THE WORLD

Editor, SCIENCE QUESTION BOX:

What will be the likely end of the world, and is it true that the earth may fall into the sun?—K. M., Jackson Hts., L. I.

This is a highly problematical and theoretical query to which no positive answer can be given. It is unlikely that the earth will ever fall into the sun unless some totally unforeseen catastrophe disturbs the present perfect balance of gravity and the kinetics of celestial motion. Whether or not the sun will burn out, letting the family of planets freeze to death is another point on which scientists differ by millions of years.

One of the greatest uncertainties is the present destination of the entire solar system

which is moving in the general direction of the constellation Hercules at the rate of approximately twelve miles per second.

Since we know this to be at this time an expanding universe—a condition in which the various starry galaxies are speeding outward and away from each other—the chances for a collision with another stellar body or system are quite remote.

In brief, there is no tenable prediction for the end of the world based upon the present state of scientific knowledge.

HOW IS A STAR BORN?

Editor, SCIENCE QUESTION BOX:

Just how does a star come into existence?—L. E. L., Boise, Idaho.

This question comes as a fortunate sort of extension of the one just foregoing. Science is not fully agreed on the exact process as yet, but it is generally conceded that stars form as giant nebulae of the nebulous, gaseous matter which permeates all space, falling under the laws of gravity and mass and slowly condensing in form. This condensation creates terrific heat and energy—a cubic foot of such matter weighing several thousand tons—and as the pressure increases the heat does likewise, until the birthing gas assumes a more or less globular form and

begins to glow red.

As the pressure and heat increase so does the intensity of the radiation, until the star glows with a certain degree of white or yellow light. It is then known as a normal star, a stellar body that constantly shrinks in size as it ages. The older it gets the less is its radiant loss. The inevitable end is a dying explosion or a gradual dissipation of its initial and enormous stored energy. Barring accidents, this is the history of the life cycle of a star, confirmable by a study of various novae in different stages of composition.

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A Hall of Fame Selection

HORNETS

THE *Medusa* seemed motionless in space, not a tremor to indicate her swift transit to Uranus. The rockets had been practically cut off, and the great interplanetary liner drove through the void on her own momentum. In appearance she resembled a silvery, enormously magnified shell fired from a huge siege gun, but her passengers would not have understood this simile. Those ancient weapons had been superseded before the close of the Twentieth century, and this was the Twenty-third.

Within that colossal shell were nearly a thousand passengers, a crew of four hundred sky-men and, handy to the exit chutes, a troop of forty-two I.F.P.'s and their commander. This unit was of the Inter-

planetary Flying Police who carried the law of the dominant human race to the outermost orbit of the solar system.

The I.F.P. room followed the standard of other compartments in the *Medusa's* outer layer. It had a floor whose gentle curve followed the curvature of the shell, walls that slanted inward toward the center of the ship, making a wedge whose edge was cut off by the metal ceiling about twelve feet high. The rotation of the ship on its longitudinal axis (strangely reminiscent of those ancient fighting shells) served in lieu of gravity to hold objects to the floor.

Patrolman Hy Dinsmore crawled out of his fighting "Hornet"—an egg-shaped vessel just big enough to hold one man com-

The "Coward" of the Space Lanes Proves



Lander leaped to one of the wall lookouts as the cloud about the pirate thinned

of SPACE

By R. F. STARZL

Author of "The Terrors of Argi," etc.

fortably—which he had been tuning up, to hear the cry:

"Fight!"

It was music to his ears, as it was to the ears of every man there, for the voyage was already becoming tedious. From their hammocks, in every part of the spacious room, men swarmed to the center where, under a cluster of emanation light bulbs, two men were milling in combat. A ring quickly formed around them, and the men took sides, cheering for one or another of the gladiators.

"It's the rookie, Strickland. Go it, Larry!"

"Don't let the rook rook you, Neary!" another cheered.

Neary had left the imprints of his

knuckles on more than one member of the Police. He was the best bet, though he was not popular.

"Watch out for his left, rookie!"

Bam! Neary's granite left, backed by 170 pounds of knotted muscle and bone, landed on Strickland's jaw. The rookie's head jerked, but he did not fall. He drew back a step, then recoiled. His own right, with a long, easy, deceptively swift motion, lashed out. Neary caught the blow on his forearm, and it jarred him to the heels. The rookie, counting on that momentary unbalance, stepped in, delivered a blow with his left and another swift, stabbing right, catching Neary over the heart.

Neary crashed back into the ring of applauding men. He was quickly lifted to his

His Worth to the Interplanetary Police!

feet and pushed back into the arena. His crooked, fighting face drawn in a snarl, he rushed at the recruit. Strickland nimbly stepped aside, unleashed that deadly right again, but halted it in midair.

Neary had stumbled, fallen flat on his face. A great cheer went up. It had been a good fight. Someone doused a bucket of water over the vanquished champion while others almost deferentially sponged Strickland's bruised features.

LATER that evening Neary was offered the opportunity of a return match as provided by the unwritten code of the force, but he declined and shook hands with Strickland. Later Dinsmore sauntered over to Strickland's hammock and invited him to sit on the floor-plates for a game.

When the smoke of their pipes had mingled, Dinsmore broached the question that had mildly interested the guard-room.

"If it's none of my business, say so, but how did you and Tuffy Neary happen to get in a jam, anyhow?"

The recruit's blue eyes became suddenly hard, and he looked at Dinsmore in a disquieting way.

"No offense, rookie," Dinsmore said promptly. "Really none of our business."

"No, it isn't, but I don't mind telling you. He made a wisecrack about Miss Quentin. That's all, just a wisecrack."

Dinsmore's leathern face slit into humorous wrinkles, but he did not grin openly.

"Affair of the heart, huh? Well, this oughta settle it."

"Don't know as it does. Miss Quentin is—well, we're just friends."

"Well-o," Dinsmore commented, emitting a puff of blue smoke. "Don't let me discourage you, but you're in fast company. All of the ship's officers are balmy about her—our own Commander, too. Ever since that blue-eyed, black-haired little bundle of personality took over the signal office the ship hasn't been the same, so a rookie more or less—"

"I'll get my commission in time," Strickland stated.

"So-o-o! Easy goes. Sure, you will, with your ambish and bein' like one of them movie gods they used to take pictures of. With that curly brown hair of yours, and the trim and athletic way you carry your weight—"

"Aw, dry up! Ever since I got detailed to this outfit I've been curious about that long drink of water who's camping over near the corner port. Who is he, anyway? Looks like he's lost his last friend."

Dinsmore wagged his slightly grizzled head in the direction of a patrolman dressed, like the rest of them, in fatigue shorts. He was practically the only man in the room who was by himself. He sat moodily in his hammock, his lean, wiry figure drooping in an attitude of dejection. His dark hair fell in strings over his eyes, partially hiding a rather thin face. Efficient and well-trained as any of the troop in the daily routine, he retired within himself during the liberty periods.

"He's under a cloud," Dinsmore explained shortly. "Cowardice."

"Don't see how he can stay on the Force," Strickland remarked, looking at the man sympathetically.

"Oh, nothing to prefer charges on. Henderson was cornered by a gang of outlaws on Mercury six months ago. Had a bunch of valuable papers for delivery. If he'd held out for another twenty-four hours we'd have grabbed the gang, but when things got hot he slid out, losing the works."

Strickland had been on the Force long enough to realize the seriousness of Henderson's act. True, the regulations provided that the men of the I.F.P. seek their own safety in moments of deadly peril when no other lives were involved, but rare was it that a man ignored the unwritten code to obey this article of the regulations.

Stretched on the plates under Henderson's hammock was a bulldog. He was a massive brute, with great, powerful bowed legs, an enormous wrinkled head and insignificant hindquarters. There was nothing odd about that, for the I.F.P. had lordly ways, and the General Order which authorized its members to take pets with them went above all regulations that might be in force for others on the same ships. Pets were good for the morale of the men, for often one of them might be on solitary post for a year on some insignificant little planetoid with no company save a dog or possibly an intelligent little Venus monkey.

But there was something odd about this dog. He had none of the natural dignity and composure of his breed. He seemed dejected, hangdog, as he too could not forget the shame of that retreat. Strickland commented on the dog.

"Calls him Hank," Dinsmore supplied. "Since this is just a convoy job, none of the other men brought their pets. But Henderson—he needs the company!"

A COUPLE of days later Larry Strickland's turn came for ship liberty. With five others of the troop he was allowed to roam the long corridors at will, to mingle with the passengers in the huge assembly sections—even to invade the sacrosanct navigating room in the nose of the shell. But Strickland was interested in none of this.

His first steps were to the signal room. Two operators were on duty, but not Marcel Quentin, so he sought her in the main assembly section. There were hundreds of passengers walking around between the tall columns of satin-finished metal that radiated like the spokes of a wheel from the central core. They looked like flies walking inside the rim of a wheel two hundred feet in diameter.

After a good hour's search Strickland saw the girl standing beside one of the quartz ports in the floor which afforded a wonderful view of the heavens in their slow, majestic rotation. She was alone, gazing down.

Strickland did not hurry directly toward her, but moved in her direction in an aimless way. A group of passengers playing a deck game came between them, and when Strickland saw her again he received an un-

pleasant surprise. She was affectionately greeting the pariah of the troop, Henderson.

Henderson had left his dog in his quarters, and had shed some of his depression. He spoke to her eagerly, and they were apparently absorbed in each other. Strickland had no desire to eavesdrop, yet he could not turn right around and go back. A group of young men in shorts and young women in flowing robes of the most fashionable and exquisite cut were watching him with evident amusement, not untinted by a very sophisticated sort of malice. He leaned against the guard-rail and pretended to look through a floor port.

Then Strickland received another shock. Marcel lifted her maddening lips to Henderson. The tall soldier stooped to kiss her, turned sharply on his heel, and walked away.

Burning with indignation, his pride bruised, Strickland focused his eyes on the planetoid Eros, still half a million miles away, whose orbit they would intersect.

"Hi, Mr. Strickland; how's the force?" There was no embarrassment in Marcel's sweet voice, nor in her radiant smile. "Why didn't you join the party?" she bantered.

"I didn't see him," Strickland evaded, trying not to be sullen.

"It was a surprise to me," she said. "He wrote he was coming, and I saw his name on the bulletin, but this is the first time I met him this year."

Strickland said nothing. He caught a glimpse of a sturdy figure in blue and brass, and the little yellow skullcap of the Service, coming their way. "Seems to be field day for the I.F.P.," he observed.

"It's Mr. Neary," said Marcel. "If we stay here long enough we can call the roll. Good morning, Mr. Neary!"

Neary grinned, saluted. He was not unhandsome when he was pleasant, and the signs of his recent battle were fading.

"Saw Henderson here," he commented.

"Yes, he just left," Strickland admitted. He hoped Neary wouldn't start anything.

"Did you tell her?"

"Tell her what?"

"About Henderson."

There was a frosty glint in Marcel's eyes. "What about Henderson?" she challenged.

"Know he's yellow, don't you?" sneered Neary.

Smack! Marcel's small firm hand had connected resoundingly with Neary's cheek. The white imprint of it was drowned in a few seconds by an all-suffusing flow of red that climbed up his neck and flooded over his face.

"Didn't know you were sweet on him," he mumbled after a pause. The occurrence had created a mild sensation and everybody was looking.

"You fool!" Strickland growled. "I ought to burn you an extra one."

"Any time you want to try it!" Neary returned belligerently as he moved away.

Strickland turned to Marcel.

"Miss Quentin," he apologized, "don't take Neary as representative of the Force. He isn't, really."

The girl's chin came up, and the tears

EDITOR'S NOTE



Some stories are forgotten almost as soon as they are printed. Others stand the test of time.

Because "Hornets of Space," by R. F. Starzl, has stood this test, it has been nominated for SCIENTIFICTION'S HALL OF FAME.

In each issue, for several forthcoming numbers, we will reprint one of the most outstanding fantasy classics of all time, as selected by our readers.

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which had threatened to well up subsided. Her voice was cool.

"Thank you, Mr. Strickland. Some day you may understand."

The *Medusa's* navigator got busy as his craft neared Eros. It was very unlikely that the ship should cross the little planet's orbit at exactly the right time to cause a collision, but Eros exerted a noticeable pull, and many lives depended on a safe margin being maintained.

Suddenly the alarm bell in the guardroom clanged. An instant later Commander Lander burst into the room, his tunic only half-buttoned.

"Man your hornets!" he bellowed. "Buccaneer sighted off Eros. Probably his nest. We've got to get him before he gets us."

Each man sprang to his machine, those who had been on liberty catapulting through the door as they shed their dress uniforms and took up post. The small craft were quickly rolled through a gallery which led to a chute near the center line of the ship. Here the "centrifugal gravity" was hardly noticeable, and the little ships could be handled easily. One after another they were pushed into the chute—thirty-three of them, counting the commander's.

The men climbed into the egg-shaped shells, pulled the safety hatches. The airlock of the chute closed with a thud. The outer lock opened, showing a round section of black sky brilliantly studded with stars. Like the pugnacious little insects after which they were named, the fighting craft swarmed into space.

They flew in broken-ring formation, this maneuver calculated to prevent a penetrating beam sweeping more than one of them at a time. At the same time the little craft kept weaving from side to side in a swift, much-practiced maneuver. Thus, if a pilot were momentarily paralyzed by a penetrating beam, his sidewise motion might carry

him out of the beam before he could suffocate.

Larry Strickland, the recruit, took his assigned place some five hundred yards below the commander's ship, which was utterly without any distinguishing marks. The other ships were at similar intervals, making a huge, irregular ring some 1,000 yards in diameter, the separate units of which, at relative speeds of some 1,000 miles an hour and more, were very difficult targets.

"Increase intervals, speed six-fifty," Commander Lander's steady voice came from the annunciator. Strickland repeated the order, as did all the other fighting men. An automatic radio recording device would show Lander if the order was correctly received and repeated.

"Rotate plane ninety degrees."

The great loose ring approaching the buccaneer turned smartly on its edge, slipped between the big ship and the sun in whose overwhelming blinding glare it was momentarily lost. The outlaw was enveloped in a blinding blue haze as reverse rockets came into play. Then in a break-neck swerving maneuver, the pirate craft turned and sought again for a point of vantage before the sun.

Strickland studied the enemy ship. It was in some respects similar to the *Medusa*, but it was considerably older, and it had the slimmer, grimmer lines of a fighting ship. Painted in broad black near its nose were the skull and cross-bones. Came Lander's voice:

"Retreat nine hundred into the sun."

Strickland grunted as the acceleration drove the breath out of his body.

"For your information, men," Lander went on, "that's the old *Redoubtable* of the Martian Colonies Special Service. She disappeared mysteriously on an errand to Saturn, commander and personnel believed lost. Can't tell if the gang turned pirate. Doubt it. The ship was probably captured some way, crew killed. Anyway, they're outlaws now, and it's up to us to get them. When I give the signal I want you to break formation, every man fighting for himself. Whoever can, whenever you can, lay your egg on the hull. Repeat."

Every man repeated the order, and almost immediately came the command:

"Attack!"

LIKE an explosion, the ordered disorder of the ring flew apart, and the tiny hornets of the void dashed in to the kill. Only in the vastness of space was such speed safe, and not too safe either. Strickland found himself hesitating alone, with the battleship bearing down upon him, its rockets throwing out fanwise a brilliant double stream of electrons, ghastly blue, as vast and awe-inspiring as a comet's tail.

That pause might have cost the recruit's life, had it not been for the sun in back of him. The pirate did not see him. But Strickland, pausing a moment longer, saw a thin, metallic streak as one of his comrades dashed for the big ship's back. In another second the magnetic high-explosive bomb would be clinging to the hull and the battle would be all over.

But in the last desperate sliver of time the pirate ship suddenly disappeared. In its place a vast, black, formless cloud of stygian darkness thundered through space. The metallic streak struck that cloud with a shattering, though soundless, explosion. The fighting little hornet simply disappeared, blown to atoms by the stupendous, silent explosion of the bomb it carried.

Immediately the voice of Commander Lander came:

"Cancel that order. Attack no more. The pirate has developed some new form of etheric armor. It stops all wave motion, and also, no doubt, atomic and molecular movement. That's why we can't see him—light won't pass. If you try to carry an egg in, the violent molecular disarrangement in the explosive as it first touches the edge of the cloud will set it off. If you should succeed in getting one inside it prob'ly won't explode at all."

A pause, then: "Men, that was Johnson who was just killed. We'll make them pay for that. As long as that cloud's around them, they can't use their power rays. Neither can they see us or the *Medusa*. Globe formation, radius one thousand yards. Repeat."

Swiftly the avengers took their position, making a loosely woven globe around their prey. The *Medusa* had gone on her way toward that unwanted tryst with Eros. It was doubtful that the pirate had expected to find such a strong force of the I.F.P. with the *Medusa*. Ordinarily four men would have been considered enough. But it so happened that a certain La Bahn, operative of the S.S.S., the Solar Secret Service, had made a curt suggestion, which had been grimly and unquestioningly followed.

Commander Lerner spoke again, betraying satisfaction:

"We've got him where we want him now. As long as that cloud's around him he can't see us. We can't hurt him, but he can't hurt us. He can't tell where he is. He can't even change his direction. Probably his rockets won't work in the absolute zero—colder even than space, under that neutralizing blanket. We've got him!"

Brash theorizing! As if to belie Lander's words a spot of hazel light suddenly broke through the black cloud directly beneath Larry Strickland. He did not see the deadly beam that reached up for him, for he was in its very center. He was conscious only of an instantaneous paralysis, heard the cessation of the low buzz of the disintegrator motor at his feet, felt a numbing cold—and then he could not see any more.

He seemed to be slipping, endlessly, into cold and clammy nothingness, yet there was feeling enough left in him to sense a violent jolt. The next moment his head was clear again, and his power supply functioning. Not a dozen yards away he saw another ship, the I.F.P. insignia on its blunt nose, circling the base of the stubby, serrated ram used for close-order fighting.

He saw the grinning, freckled face of Billy Ikon—he who could be trusted with a man's money and his life, but not his

cigarettes. They were far out of formation. Billy, at the risk of his own life, had sideswiped Larry out of the hazel beam to safety. He thumbed his nose, waved his hand, and dashed back into formation, kicking Larry's ship with his rocket stream so that it spun dizzily in all directions.

The pirate now forsook his passive role. Clearly the etheric blanket was controllable from the inside, for the hazel spots began appearing in various places, providing openings for the fighting weapons and means for sighting on the enemy. At the same time his rockets began to spew again.

THE little hornets resumed their ceaseless weaving, but could not entirely escape the merciless fingers of light and baleful power that cut through space like solid matter. As Strickland turned he saw an I.F.P. fighter get caught in a hazel beam, saw his weaving maneuvers change to aimless drifting. The ship nearest dashed out to bunt it clear, but the beam was pertinacious. It clung to them both, followed them for a minute as they drifted away into eternal cold and death.

Several other ships went in pursuit. "Stay in formation!" came the sharp command. "He wants us to cluster together. Watch your chances!"

Several of the fighters swooped down to drop their magnetic bombs. There was no gravity, of course, so the term "drop" is inaccurate. However, by diving straight at the black cloud, releasing the bombs and zooming away, the bombs would fly in their original direction. But in every instance they exploded the moment their leading edge touched the cloud. One unlucky flyer, tarrying a moment too long, was blown up, his ship still intact, so that he narrowly missed another ship. The gory spectacle through the quartz windows as he hurtled past was enough to forestall attempts at rescue.

Now the pirate chose to throw caution aside. For a short interval he unveiled himself, and with a quick, reckless sweep of half a dozen power beams, made casualties of nine more of Lander's force. Immediately he shrouded himself in darkness again and, ignoring the depleted remnants of the troop, darted off in determined pursuit of the *Medusa*, already a telescopic distance away.

The *Medusa* was making good time. Her rocket stream lay across space, a rapidly widening and thinning path of luminescence already bending away from the sun's light pressure. Of the ship itself nothing could be seen. Parallel to that telltale path, the outlaw plunged, and only twenty of the police ships were left to follow in the old ring formation. Ignoring them was not entirely a gesture of bravado on the part of the buccaneer. If he stopped to wipe them all out, the *Medusa* might have time to summon help from the Martian orbital patrol, that planet itself being at the time far on the other side of the sun.

As the desperate chase went on, the little fighting ships harried the pirate from all sides, but he was immune. Lander gave a call.

"Will someone volunteer to dive into his rocket stream?"

This was almost equivalent to calling for a suicide, but several of the men immediately volunteered. The radio annunciator before Lander clicked briskly.

"Hartz, you try it. Drive straight into it. If you win inside the cloud, lay your egg and try to get out. Time it ten seconds. Good luck, boy!"

Hartz's hornet fell back, far out of formation. Then he came flashing along. There was a glimpse of sunbrunt face mottled with gray—the acceleration was tremendous. Up in a breathless swoop. Now he was parallel to the backward-rushing blue stream, gaining rapidly on the point of greatest intensity where it poured out of the etheric envelope.

The entire rear surface of the hornet blazed as with a supreme burst of speed it swerved directly into the opening. And then a soundless, ghastly explosion. The bomb had gone off prematurely, doing no harm to the pirate but killing the carrier.

But no! The pirate had not gone unscathed. He must have felt the shock. The cloud seemed to thin, and the pursuers could see the harsh outlines of the ship as through a fog. Then it strengthened, and the black blot in space rushed on toward the *Medusa* which it was overhauling fast.

A few minutes ago she had come in sight as a mere glistening speck; now she was barely three miles away, and a sinister hazel beam was seeking her—seeking to paralyze one of her rockets, which would make her drive in a wide, futile circle to await the pleasure of the attackers. Her port rocket glistened as the beam caressed it, the blue blaze of its discharge glimmered out. The ship began to bear away from its course, to limp.

Savage and confident as a tiger, the pirate turned on the straggling police hornets again. The hazel spots blinked with bewildering frequency.

"Globe formation!" Lander snapped. "Radius two thousand yards. On the order converge. Every man use his own judgment. This'll be a dog fight for good. All ready, con-verge!"

AS STEEL flies to the magnet, so the remaining ships hurled themselves on the enemy. One who tried to carry a bomb through the black cloud was blown up. Two more, who had discarded their bombs, dived through the cloud and promptly drifted away in masses of wreckage. Their rams had not been designed to penetrate the stout plates of a battle cruiser.

Strickland fought as in a dream. The incredibly fast and intricate maneuvers in which he had been drilled daily came to him spontaneously now. Unconsciously he maintained lateral movement, which drifted him out of the paralyzing beams several times. He had hurled his "egg" into the cloud and had enjoyed rapturous transports when it penetrated instead of exploding. But the bomb had simply not exploded.

In that mad minute he dived, dodged, twisted, and every second death's hand was on his neck. Close beside him a ship

drifted in the hazel ray, and he saw Henderson's unconscious face. Like a thunderbolt another came from above and batted Henderson's ship to safety. He saw Henderson resume his tactics at the same time the other ship, caught in the beam, started to drift.

Strickland hurled himself against it. He felt an agonizing stopping of his heart. Then they were both clear. Through the strong ports he saw Neary, his face a mask of fighting fury, hurl himself again upon the outlaw, prodding blindly through the cloud, drifting out unconscious.

It could not last. The tide of battle was setting in stronger for the pirate. Lander in desperation gave the order to retreat to the *Medusa* for a final stand. Like autumn leaves before a storm the remnants of the gallant little force fled to temporary safety.

Without a pause for orientation, the little ships dashed into the airlock, and in a few moments the survivors were helped out of their cramped quarters by white-faced skymen, members of the *Medusa's* crew. Six hours had been consumed in that disastrous fight, told here so briefly. It was after midnight, though the sun burned changelessly, and the passengers had practically all gone to bed.

Shipmaster Nailor, his florid face full of consternation, shook Commander Lander as he climbed out of his hornet and almost collapsed.

"For God's sake, sir! What are you going to do?"

Lander looked at him with a twisted smile and drawled:

"What in space have we been doing all night? Fight some more, of course! Are the light projectors in shape to use?"

"We can get them ready in a minute. They're not unhooded."

"No, I suppose not. Get your crews on them, if they aren't sleeping too hard. Peck away at the cloud. There's a pirate battleship inside it, the old *Redoubtable*. By the time you penetrate that cloud you may still have power enough left to burn a little paint off it."

"Sir!" Nailor stammered, "this is no time for joking!"

"Sir!" growled Lander, "I am not joking. All right, men, let's have a look at you."

They lined up, a scant third of the original troop. Lander recognized Strickland, Dinsmore, Ikon and some of the other survivors. The others were so battered and bruised as to be unrecognizable.

"Tough, men!" The commander smiled thinly. "All right, I'm looking over the fighting ports. You men reload your nests with one egg apiece. Wait in the chute. Where's Neary? I thought I saw him a minute ago."

"Neary was killed in the last mixup," a lanky patrolman with an ugly gash on his forehead reported. "He seemed dizzy, and crashed with another man—Jenkins, I think."

"I saw him just before we retreated, giving Henderson a bump," Strickland volunteered.

"Was Henderson killed? I don't see him." There was regret and pride in Lan-

der's voice. Pride because he was an old man on the Force and held its honor dear; regret because his men were almost as sons to him. "I knew Henderson was all right!"

Ikon said nervously, his honest good-humored face perplexed:

"Just when the fighting got hottest I saw Henderson high-tailing past me toward Earth. When I looked again a minute later I could only see the wake of his rocket. Going some, I'd say. Then I was knocked out for a minute."

THERE was a blank pause. After a painful silence Lander managed in a stifled voice:

"All right, Mayes, we'll look over the fighting ports."

A wall annunciator rasped:

"Watch officer, navigating room speaking. The pirate is shedding his cloud. He's drifting across our course about a half mile behind us, heading for Eros."

"What!" Lander leaped to one of the wall lookouts, waited eagerly for the ship's rotation to bring the pirate into view.

"That's right!" he exclaimed. "Looks like one of our bombs got him after all. But it may be a stall to get us where he can finish us quick. Nailor, see that your men are ready on post."

If the outlaw was shamming, he was doing a good job of it. The impenetrable cloud had thinned, allowing the ship to be vaguely seen through it. It was turning end over end, accelerating at an uneasy rate toward Eros—now ominously large—as a ship falling out of control would fall. Now and again its rockets would spout blue flame, but these fitful spurts only slowed its fall, could not stop it.

They watched it for a full hour and the *Medusa*, her rockets again working splendidly, swept on her way, so that the early rising passengers only caught a glimpse of the sterile little planet being left far behind.

Having slept in the ship's hospital for fifteen hours, bathed, shaved and breakfasted, the survivors of the troop were all given liberty that they might bask in the well-earned admiration of the passengers. In their close-fitting blue uniforms, their trig skullcaps of fine brassy wires beautifully woven, they were well adapted to capture feminine hearts already stirred by the tale of their daring.

Strickland, however, sought out the bulletin board of the main assembly section. Here he read Lander's official report of the battle. He scanned the closely printed sheets until he came to the paragraph he was seeking:

HENDERSON, HYDE: Killed in final and successful attack on outlaw. No details are known.

There was a lump in Strickland's throat. "Say what you like," the thought ran through his mind, "Lander is a liar and a prince! Not for Henderson's sake, the yellow quitter, but for her sake—and for the sake of the Force's honor, I only hope the dirty coward won't ever show up alive again and let her know!"

As he turned to go, he almost bumped into Marcel Quentin. He flushed guiltily, as if she could read his thoughts. Her usually mobile face was passive with recent grief, but it also bore the stamp of pride and of love vindicated.

"Miss Quentin," Strickland stammered awkwardly, "I'm sorry! That is—your sweetheart—"

A flicker of a smile touched her pale face.

"He was not my sweetheart," she said simply. "He was my half-brother, but I really didn't feel called upon to make explanations to anybody. After his father was killed off Neptune, his mother married my father. Hyde was always a good boy, kind to me. I understood him." She smiled proudly, sadly. "Didn't I?"

Strickland looked straight into her tender blue eyes and blackened his soul with a lie.

"Yes," he admittedly steadily. "Yes."

A YEAR later, with the ink not dry on his commission, Lieutenant Larry Strickland of the I.F.P., because of his special knowledge of the battle, was given command of the *Spunky*, a squat, business-like little patrol ship, which was to take a delegation of learned experts to view the wreckage of the old *Redoubtable*, definitely reported as located on Eros, but never closely examined.

By special permission he took along his bride, acquired about the same time as the commission. But when he and the experts donned their sausagelike vacuum suits for the work on the airless, frigid little dust-mote in immensity, Strickland was quite firm about making Marcel stay on the *Spunky*, almost precipitating their first quarrel.

With long, effortless jumps he and the commissioners leaped across the broken, harsh landscape to a scarred ravine in which the twisted wreckage had been

sighted. They clambered about the sprawling mass of twisted metal, coming across the bodies, here and there, of the pirate crew.

They were frozen hard, lifelike, except for the tiny droplets of blood that had oozed through the skin, and showed clearly the marks of terror. Slowly gaining speed in the weak but fatal attraction of Eros—while their air leaked off into space—they had fallen to their certain death. Their rigid bodies were not broken, however, showing that the fall had been relatively gentle.

Suddenly an excited voice rattled the radio diaphragm in Lieutenant Strickland's helmet.

"For Pluto's sake, gentlemen, come and see what I found!"

Strickland recognized a standard "hornet," split open but otherwise uninjured. Its serrated ram had struck the battleship in one of its few vulnerable parts, the flexible bushing of a hazel ray projector. The ram had penetrated it, caught, and dragged the little ship to destruction with the big one.

Starkly revealed in the glaring reflection of sunlight on a nearby rock was Henderson, still at the hornet controls. His lean face was set and frozen in an expression of exaltation. So had he looked in that moment of blind self-sacrifice when he had retreated far into space to gain momentum for his last, desperate plunge—the forlorn hope that had won the battle.

On the floor of the little ship, his massive legs bowed and every rigidly frozen muscle tense, his ears pointed wickedly, his ugly face set in a soundless snarl of battle-lust, stood Hank, the bulldog—his face to the enemy as he went out. Which is not required by the regulations, but is clearly understood by those who know the Code.

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Mankind Is Plunged into Turmoil When a Young Scientist Creates an Artificial Oceanic Island

IN

THE MAKING OF MISTY ISLE

By

STANTON A. COBLENTZ



NEXT ISSUE'S HALL OF FAME SELECTION

Mister John Doe, Earthman

By **JOSEPH J. MILLARD**

Author of "Crash on Viar," "The Crystal Invaders," etc.



The thought-stone felt queerly warm in his palm

A Cosmic Cloud Threatens to Destroy the Sun—and Only an Alien Visitor with a Nebulous Memory Can Save It!

THE discovery was made by Rav Tuu of the Astronometric Institute on the third night of Tantak, in the solar period of Chra. His first impulse was to hurl himself from the high tower of the observatory to the pitiless rocks below, to cheat the inexorable doom he read in the heavens. Then he thrust the idea from him with grim resolve.

He was but one citizen among Vuul's teeming billions, one unit in their vast culture. He had no right to flee cravenly from a doom that threatened all. Besides, the unavoidable fate, horrible in contemplation, would really be swift and painless. He

doubted that his eyes would even behold the first stark blaze of the cosmic explosion that would utterly destroy the six worlds.

Rav Tuu squared his massive shoulders and summoned a conference of the *Vog Ed Chr*—the Council of Seven. It took Xuz, *decat* of that council, but a few minutes to confirm Rav Tuu's terrible discovery.

"Vuul," Xuz admitted slowly, "is doomed, as are the other five worlds of our solar system. There can be no doubt now."

"Then our effort failed?" Bet Nar asked with quiet dignity.

"Worse," was Xuz's cryptic answer. "Years ago we discovered the true cause of novae, the new stars that blaze up to tremendous brilliance for a time and then die away. We had always believed the cause to lie in an internal explosion of an unstable sun. Then we discovered it was not the star which exploded, but a tenuous cloud of cosmic dust drifting into that sun from outer space. We immediately perfected instruments to detect and measure the drift of these clouds, in order to examine the possibility of our own doom.

"Years ago we detected such a cloud drifting straight toward our own sun. It was, we saw, vast enough to entangle all our five worlds in its meshes. Its final explosion, when a streamer projected inward far enough to touch our sun, would annihilate every living thing in our system. Other galaxies would record another nova in the skies. For us, though, there would be but six charred lifeless hulks revolving around the embers of a dying sun."

"But our defense!" Dan En broke in. "We were sure that, using the illimitable energy of the new element *wro* we could project a force beam strong enough to deflect the drifting cloud safely into a new path. Did that fail, *Decat*?"

"Worse," Xuz repeated dully. "Tonight Rav Tuu saw the beam strike the cloud. Something, perhaps some characteristic of space about which we know nothing, deflected that beam by a fraction of a *kret*. It struck the cloud, but instead of changing its line

of drift, the beam split the cloud into two parts.

"One part, still vast enough to blanket our solar system, is continuing toward us unchecked. The other, hurled aside, is rushing toward the solar system of the Ard-seven sun. We not only failed to save ourselves, but, by our efforts, we have doomed a neighboring system to the same destruction."

"Can't we try again by redirecting our beam?"

XUZ shook his head. "The apparently illimitable energy of the element *wro* is not illimitable, after all. Everything but a small and useless handful of our entire supply was broken down to supply the energy needed by that first beam. There can be no more force beams."

"Then there is no escape?"

"A bare hope," Xuz acknowledged. "Our last planet, Cex, is too far from our sun to be habitable. Hence it has been largely neglected by us. There is a chance that we might be able to move to Cex, taking our whole population, and there apply the power necessary to break the thin thread of gravity. By hurling Cex completely out of our system, we might escape the explosion. The small planet would become, in effect, a space ship for us, to be maneuvered into some other, safer system."

"But that other solar system—is there no way we can save them from the other cloud? It would be unthinkable to save ourselves at their expense. True, they are across the universe from us in space and time, yet only next door to us in space-time. We have watched and studied their chief planet, Earth, for so long through our space-warp window that we regard their inhabitants as friends, even though they know nothing of our existence. Is there no way of saving them?"

"They could save themselves, if they but knew," Xuz replied sadly. "They have that titanic force which they call electricity, which is unknown here because our planet is entirely metal. With electricity they could easily construct a force beam capable of deflect-

ing the cloud. But unfortunately they have not discovered the true nature of novae. Even if they saw the cloud approaching, they would not realize its meaning."

Rav Tuu suddenly spoke up.

"Decat, we have long considered the possibility of enlarging that space-warp window until it becomes a door through which we could actually visit Earth. Could that not be done now, so that one of us might go through and warn Earth and show them how to save themselves?"

Startled glances turned his way. Xuz answered the ring of questioning faces.

"It is possible, I think, but to do so would exhaust the last slender store of the element *wro*. Perhaps one person might get through, but no more, and that one could never return. It would be necessary to break up that messenger's body into its component atoms and send it through the space-warp door as a beam. If we could focus that beam on Earth, beyond the door, those atoms *might* be reassembled into the same body.

"We are nearly like Earth people in form and appearance, but I am concerned for the mind pattern atoms. They are of a subtler fiber and might not rearrange themselves correctly. In that case we might have a messenger without a mind, or one who had lost the memory of his mission on the way."

"As to the depletion of the element *wro*," Rav Tuu said eagerly, "we shall have little use for that now, since our hope of using it against the cloud is dead. I am willing to risk the journey to Earth! I could take a thought-stone with me. You could project your thoughts to me through it, reminding me of my mission and helping my mind pattern to reform itself."

"I agree to the experiment," Bet Nar interposed. "We owe their system that fighting chance at salvation. But I fear that even if Rav Tuu succeeds in entering Earth and remembering his mission, he could never persuade Earth governments to believe him. We have seen enough of their queer mentalities to know that they

are ever skeptical of strangers with warnings."

"That will be simple," Rav Tuu explained. "I can assemble a small force beam quite easily. They have nothing like it, for it involves a principle they have not yet learned. When I demonstrate the beam, they will be forced to believe me and listen."

"How about time? Is there enough to accomplish our own escape and help Earth's defense before the clouds strike?"

"Barely, I think," Xuz answered soberly. "So many factors influence the rate of drift of the clouds that absolute timing is, of course, impossible. But it appears that our own doom will come within the next two years. The other part of the cloud, following a tangential path, should reach Earth within a year or two after our destruction. It is time enough, but there is none to spare."

"Then let us begin at once!" Rav Tuu cried excitedly. "Let us prepare the apparatus for my journey to Earth immediately." He took a shimmering gray stone from a pouch at his belt. "With this thought-stone to guide me, I cannot fail."

"You *must* not fail, Rav Tuu," Xuz answered grimly. "Your failure means not only the destruction of all the millions of beings upon Earth, but all the varying life forms on her eight neighboring planets as well. You must not fail!"

THE man awoke slowly and lay for a time with his eyes closed, allowing the impressions carried to his brain by his auditory, olfactory and tactile nerves to drive away the dark mists. There were fitting thought images in his brain, but he could not capture any of them. Elusive memories, they danced mockingly just beyond his grasp.

Only one sensation had material substance, a terrible feeling of urgency that hung upon his swirling mind and coursed like fire through his veins. There was a task he had to do, a mission that had to be accomplished. Some terrible, inconceivable fate hung upon the success or failure of that mission.

But what was the mission? The man could not remember. He could not even remember who he was, where he was or how he got there. His mind was a swirling void, filled with the phantoms of unformed thought pictures, forgotten memories.

Suddenly he became aware of something gripped in one hand, a smooth, hard object, shaped like a fat disc. It felt queerly warm in his palm, warm and faintly tingling, with a vague, steady pulsation that he could sense rather than feel.

Instinctively his grip tightened upon the object. The closer contact sent a faint thread of current up through his arm and shoulder and neck, into his brain. With that flow, the mists suddenly cleared from his mind and the whirling phantoms steadied. In place of the chaos came a single clear, sharp mental image.

It was the picture of a vast stone room, filled with a maze of strange, but vaguely familiar instruments and devices. One seemed to be a great crystal pane and around it, half-hiding it, were grouped seven alien beings. They were giants, not in height, but in breadth and massiveness of body, with tremendous solemn faces and gentle eyes filled with vast wisdom.

The man had a queer feeling that these strange creatures and their surroundings should be familiar to him. He tried vainly to think, to remember. "Well done, Rav Tuu!"

There were no audible sounds, yet the words formed themselves on the screen of the man's mind.

"Well done. You have reached Earth and the thought-stone is safe in your grasp. Your mission may actually be accomplished. For the moment you are shaken, your mind clouded by the jarring impact of the atomic structures, but that will pass and your memory will reshape itself as we guide it by means of the thought-stone. Arise now and go—" The faces of the seven beings were suddenly distorted, lit with horror. "Rav Tuu, look out! Danger! Your mission . . . the cloud. . ."

Abruptly the picture and the subvocal words vanished. With their leaving, his mind went blank again,

except for the vague, torturous phantoms of those elusive lost memories. The man suddenly could not remember the details of the vision he had just seen, or the import of the words he had just heard.

Then he realized that the picture had vanished at the precise instant that rough hands had wrenched the disk from his grasp. Simultaneously he became aware of the reek of alcohol and unwashed bodies, and felt the rustle of movement against his own prone figure.

"I got it, Hug, and the dope never woke up," a shrill voice whispered. "He's prob'ly dead drunk. I'm gonna frisk his pockets. If he wiggles, lay that sap on his skull."

"Yeah, you got it, but what is it?" a harsher voice whined. "I never seen no chunk of rock shine in the dark like that. It ain't no sparkler and Morg don't fence nothin' but good ice."

"Don't worry. Whatever this hunk of rock is, it's worth dough. They don't cut cheap slum like this is cut and—Hey, the thing's hot! It prickles my hand and I get a funny feelin', like I'm dreamin' about—about a gang of old goats with beards, all standin' around a funny table!"

HE had been lying motionless, eyes still closed as he fought to make his sluggish senses associate impressions and sensations. Suddenly the vague feeling of urgency returned, and with it came a sharp sense of alarm. Something was desperately wrong, something about the round object that had been jerked from his hand. . . .

The man opened his eyes. He was lying on close-cropped grass, under a starlit night sky. Some distance away, a graveled path wound among trees, and a row of lamps along that path sent a filtered radiance through the leaves. By this dim glow the man could see two ragged, unshaven men squatting close, one on either side of him.

The one on his left dangled a length of thick, braided leather from a dirty paw. The one on his right was gingerly examining a queer object in his hands. It resembled a thick lens some

four inches in diameter, carved out of an odd metallic gray stone that was faintly luminescent in the darkness. The sight of the gray disk sent a strange, inexplicable stab of terror through the man. Without knowing exactly why, he surged up to a sitting position and snatched at it.

The two ragged figures whirled at his swift movement. The one holding the stone snarled in rage and jerked back, out of range of the clutching hand.

"Sap him, Migs!" he shrilled at his gaping companion. "It's a cop trap, that's what. He's a dirty flatfoot, layin' for us to roll him so he can pull a pinch. Sap the rat good!"

The man saw the length of braided leather flip up in a short, vicious arc that ended solidly against the side of his own skull. It was a blow that should have crushed bone but, although the impact knocked the man back against the sod, he felt neither pain nor numbness. He bounded up instantly.

The sight of his unbelievable recovery was too much for the thugs. With frightened curses, they scrambled to their feet and raced away from the lighted path toward the solid darkness between the trees. The man sprang to his feet, teetered uncertainly for a moment, then raced in pursuit.

He tried to remember why it was so vitally important to recover that stone. The answer danced mockingly through his mind, always just beyond his grasp, but the terrible unknown urgency was a spur that drove him on.

He was running furiously, gaining on the fugitives as he became more accustomed to the feel of his legs. People strolling along footpaths stopped in alarm as the chase whipped past. The man cut down his quarry's lead to a scant twenty feet, despite all their desperate dodging and twisting.

Suddenly they burst through thick shrubbery and out onto a curving road that led through a wide gate to a crowded avenue. People thronged the sidewalks outside the park and the street beyond was jammed with speeding vehicles. Overhead, towering buildings hurled converging lines

of lighted windows up toward the stars. But the man had eyes only for the thug with the stone.

THEY reached the gate. The two fugitives squirmed like eels into the sidewalk crowds and vanished from sight. Head down, broad shoulders driving heedlessly, the man plunged into the throng in pursuit. Men and women screamed, cursed, groaned, fell away from his plunging impact. Kicks and blows rained on his head and shoulders, but he battled straight through.

He burst out onto the curb, facing the streaming traffic in the street. His quarry was nowhere in sight. He paused blankly, unconscious of the angry rumble of the crowd at his back.

Two blue-uniformed figures charged down on him and clamped onto his arms with desperate fury.

"Okay, Blitzkrieg!" one of them snarled angrily. "What's the idea of the stampede? Do you know your thundering herd act is probably going to send five people to the hospital?"

The man stared bewilderedly. Then muscles quivered in his throat, his lips parted and sounds came forth. He was amazed to realize that, as far as he could remember, they were the first vocal sounds he had ever uttered.

"Wh—where am I?" he stammered painfully.

"In hot water, buddy."

The man shook his head. "I'm afraid I never heard of the place. Is it—"

"Oh, a wise guy, huh?"

Both policemen jerked angrily at his imprisoned arms. It was like shaking the stone pillars of the post office.

"Those two men!" the man cried suddenly. "I've got to find them. One of them has my stone!"

"Stone? What kind of a stone? What men?"

"I—I don't know. A queer gray stone, round and glowing with soft light. I was lying in the park with the stone in my hand when the men came and stole it. I—I'm not sure, but I have a queer feeling that if I get the stone back, I'll remember why I'm here."

The two cops pursed their lips and exchanged significant glances. At a nod from the bigger one, the other moved quietly toward a call box on a nearby post. He returned in a moment and said soothingly:

"Now, you just take it easy, pal. Pretty soon you'll have a nice ride down to a place where you can have all the stones you want to play with. Mike, shove them people back a little. This guy is just plain nuts and we don't want no trouble."

The man stood quietly between them, trying to remember, paying no attention to the half-fearful, half-pitying whispers around him.

On the ride downtown, they tried to question him about his name, residence, business. To every question he could only answer:

"I don't know. I can't remember."

Finally they let him pass the remainder of the trip gazing out through the small barred window of the patrol wagon. The man recognized most of the objects they passed and the more prominent buildings. His lips moved quietly from time to time, reciting their names.

QUEERLY he felt that things were not familiar to him because he had never lived among them, or been intimate with them. Rather it seemed that he knew what such things as cars and stop-lights and Radio City were from having heard and seen pictures of them. When he tried to remember where or when, the memories slid out of his reach and tantalized him.

He had come willingly on this trip because of a dim remembrance that the work of the police was to help people recover lost property. They would get back his stone for him, as soon as he could clarify his own mind and logically explain that feeling of terrible urgency associated with the stone.

Only once on the trip downtown did the man come close to remembering. That was when his gaze, following the sweeping lines of the Empire State Building, passed on to a group of stars beyond the belt of Orion. Then a queer electric shock tingled

through his nerves, a warm familiarity different from his acceptance of New York scenes.

For an instant the man saw a vision of himself, larger and heavier of body, seated before a great crystal screen, across which was flashing view after view of this very city through which he now traveled.

Then the vision fled, leaving only a poignant, aching emptiness behind. Try as he would, the man could not recapture a single fragment of that fleeting memory.

He let himself be led into the police station and up to the desk, where one of his captors reported.

"A John Doe, Sarge, that ain't got all his marbles. Can't remember who he is, or anything, except he was playing in Central Park when two bad mans comed and stoled his pitty stone. This gee comes tearin' out of the gate and does a line-buck into the mob on Park West, tramplin' some dames and conkin' a couple of guys that didn't move fast enough. So we nailed him and brang him in."

The sergeant frowned and regarded his prisoner from under lowered brows. He saw a tall, neatly dressed man of singularly rugged build, with an expression of dazed bewilderment on his handsome face. Contrary to most opinions, the sergeant was a man with feelings and a certain rough kindness in his make-up.

"Can't remember who you are or where you came from, eh?" he said briskly. "Don't let it worry you, John Doe. You'll get your memory back in time. Did you see anything that seemed familiar to you on the way here? Do you think you live in New York?"

The man, temporarily named John Doe, shook his head.

"Only once. I looked up at the stars and had a feeling that I belong up there, on one of those worlds." He raised a pleading hand. "When I first remembered anything, I was lying on the grass with the stone in my hand. I think it was bringing my memory back. Then the men snatched away the stone and all the memories went with it. I've got to get it back. I must remember what I was sent here

for. I can't remember anything without the stone."

THE sergeant exhaled noisily. "Well, that's that. Okay, Doe, you relax and we'll do what we can. Kelly, turn Gilligan of Missing Persons loose on your friend. Go through his pockets, look for laundry marks, check his prints with the civilian and criminal files. If everything else flops, have the lab boys beat some dust out of his clothes and give it a micro examination for characteristic grains that might show what kind of work he does. You go along with them, Doe. They'll—"

"But my stone! I've got to have that back!"

"Sure, sure. You leave that to us. We'll get it back." Under his breath, the sergeant added: "Or find you another one just as pretty to play with, bud."

A lanky figure in baggy tweeds had been sitting back against the station wall, balanced precariously on the back legs of a rickety chair. This was Gorman, police reporter for the *Program*. When John Doe had been led away, Gorman opened one eye, yawned and languidly scratched the back of his neck.

"Now they come from the stars," he remarked in a bored voice. "Sarge, why doesn't something interesting happen around this dump? I crave news, colossal news, something of Earth-shattering import—something that'll stand John Q. Public on his ear for a change. So I get stuck down here and what do I get? A procession of drunks, pickpockets, panhandlers, and now a screwball from Mars. What a life!"

The sergeant snorted. "You think anything important ever happens in this joint? Huh?"

The inner door burst open violently and Gilligan of the Bureau of Missing Persons bolted through. Gilligan had a heap of disordered clothing over one arm, a rectangle of cardboard in his hand and a wild gleam in his pale eyes. He waved the cardboard at the sergeant.

"Go ahead!" he challenged hoarsely. "Tell me I'm drunk. Tell me I ain't

competent to hold my job, or I'm batty, or—"

"What in the devil is biting you?" the sergeant asked.

"That guy, that John Doe you sent in." Gilligan took a deep breath. "He ain't got no fingerprints! And look at these clothes he was wearing. Laundry marks, you tell me to look for! Look at 'em yourself. They look like cloth, but they ain't. They ain't sewed and they ain't buttoned. They was made right on the guy's body and I hadda cut 'em to get 'em off."

Upstairs, in a gray-painted cell, John Doe rested his hot cheek against the cold bars and stared blankly out through the window. For some unaccountable reason his gaze kept wandering back to the flicker of a neon sign a block from the police station, a sign that read:

UNCLE MORG'S LOAN OFFICE

Whenever he looked at it, a vague feeling of desperation swept over him, an acute sharpening of the ever-present sense of an urgent mission delayed.

In a back room of the shop below that sign, Morgan, the proprietor, was addressing two furtive visitors.

"One buck, take it or leave it. It's nothing but an ordinary piece of rock, but it's kind of a nice cutting. Besides, you boys have brought in some good stuff in the past, so I don't want you to get sore. I don't really want the stone, but I'll give you a buck for it, anyhow. Want to do business?"

"Gee, Morg," the bleary-eyed, be-whiskered man with the stone whined shrilly, "it's worth more'n a buck. You squeeze that thing a little and it gets all hot and tingly in your hand. Then you get dreams just like from a sleigh-ride or a Mary Warner drag."

Morgan shrugged with elaborate indifference.

"So what? Who wants to wear a rock that gets hot and gives out screwy dreams? You wanna do business or don't you?"

There was a tone of finality in his voice. The two bums accepted the [Turn to page 116]

A THOUSAND YEARS OLD AND STILL LIVING!

A strange method of mind and body control that often leads to immense powers never before experienced is announced by Edwin J. Dingle, well-known explorer and geographer. It is said to bring about almost unbelievable improvement in power of mind. Many report improvement in health. Others acquire superb bodily strength, secure better positions, turn failure into success. Often with surprising speed, talents, ability and a more magnetic personality are developed.

The method was found in remote and mysterious Tibet, formerly a forbidden country rarely visited by outsiders and often called the land of miracles in the astounding books written about it. Here, behind the highest mountains in the world, Mr. Dingle learned the extraordinary system he is now disclosing to the Western World.

He maintains that all of us are giants in strength and mind power, capable of surprising feats, from the delay of old age to the prolonging of youth and the achievement of dazzling business and professional success. From childhood, however, we are hypnotized, our powers put to sleep by the suggestions of associates, by what we read and by various experiences.

To realize their really marvelous powers, men and women must escape from this hypnotism. The method found by Mr. Dingle in Tibet is said to be remarkably instrumental in free-

ing the mind of the hypnotizing ideas that paralyze the giant powers within us.

Our accepted ideas of old age and death, he claims, would prove utterly wrong if we could escape from their hypnotizing influence. He points to the exotic Joshua Trees of the California Desert, many of which are over a thousand years old and still living. Some are thought to be two and three thousand years old. Life and youth, he says, can persist several times longer than people think. In Tibet this is believed and certain methods, based on this belief, are employed. Incredible ages are often ascribed to sages there. "The methods are too new in the Western World," he says, "for us to have authoritative data. But they may be instrumental, meantime, in prolonging our youth and increasing our mental, physical and spiritual powers."

"The time has come," he declares, "for every enlightened man and woman to achieve the greater health, success and happiness possible through this ancient but remarkable method of mastery." His amazing 9,000 word treatise is now being offered by The Institute of Mentalphysics, 213 South Hobart Blvd., Dept. 96-L, Los Angeles, Calif. They offer to send it free to any readers of this paper who quickly send their names and addresses. Readers are urged to write promptly for the free treatise.

greasy bill and went off, grumbling. Morgan held the queer stone between his fingertips and stared at it distastefully. You squeeze it and get dreams, eh? Those bums were getting worse than ever, too much smoke and snow. They hadn't stolen anything worthwhile in weeks. He was a sucker for giving them a nickel and twice a chump for a dollar.

The jangle of a bell announced a customer out in the pawn shop, where legitimate business was transacted. Morgan snorted disgustedly and tossed the stone into a box half-filled with cheap rings, beads and miscellaneous junk. Squeeze it and see dreams!

Morgan went out to wait on his customer.

In the back room, the stone lay quietly in the trash box. A few inches away, a stub of cigarette dropped by one bum smoldered unnoticed. Presently a little spiral of gray smoke began to ooze up from the rubbish where the cigarette had fallen. Moments later a flame started.

John Doe sat quietly on the unpainted chair, staring at a patch of morning sunlight on the floor. His memory was still gone, but some of the sensation of desperate urgency had gone, too. It seemed to have left him at about the time he had been awakened by the fire down the street.

He had stood for awhile at the barred window, watching the final collapse of the building that had housed Uncle Morg's loan office. Then he had gone back to his iron bunk and fallen into a deep, dreamless slumber for the rest of the night.

Across the room now, the medical examiner and the psychiatrist conferred puzzledly with the police captain.

"Weirdest thing I ever ran into," the M.E. said heavily. "He's apparently normal in every way, except for the unnatural solidity of his body tissues and the complete absence of finger ridges. In fact there isn't a ridge anywhere on his body, nor a pore pattern, either. If I weren't afraid Bert would start examining *me*, I'd say he looks as if he hadn't been born at all, but molded out of plastic flesh. That's

nutty, of course, but it describes his appearance."

The psychiatrist, Bert Anderson, mopped his forehead.

"He's got me guessing, too, Tom. He isn't crazy in the accepted sense of the word, and he's certainly suffering from amnesia. I've given him half a dozen word association tests. They got me nowhere. He understands all the words—I mean he knows their definitions—but he doesn't seem to *think* them, if you get what I mean. He acts as though he knew English the way a phonograph record knows it. Say, maybe he's a foreigner whose mental processes still work in some foreign language!"

He turned to John Doe.

"How about it, Doe? Do you understand Swedish, by any chance?"

JOHN DOE shook his head. "I—I don't think so."

"The devil you don't!" Anderson retorted, staring. "I just asked that question in Swedish and you answered in the same tongue. What is this, anyhow—a game?"

It seemed like one in the weeks that followed. Somebody tried John Doe on a word association test in Italian. He answered fluently in the same language, but still without seeming to be able to associate words. Blucher, the German cop, got the same result with High and Low German. They tried John Doe with Spanish, French, Portuguese, Russian, even Basque. He knew them all!

The newspapers got hold of it and began to build scare-head yarns about the mystery man from Mars.

The insurance company had the ashes of the Morgan loan shop sifted for gold and precious stones that had survived the fire. Everything else was either hauled away as trash, or dumped back into the basement, to be covered with the foundations of a new structure already contracted. The stone, if it survived the heat of the fire, was neither gold nor a known gem.

Meanwhile, John Doe had been moved to a sanitarium. He was becoming something of a problem, though he was not crazy. Since ef-

forts to locate friends or relatives had failed, no one knew what to do with him. When Dr. Murlane, the mind specialist, volunteered to keep him for a few months out of professional curiosity, the city breathed a sigh of relief and gladly agreed.

John Doe was beginning to develop a lively interest in the world around him. He thought less often about his hidden past and the vague, gnawing sense of impending disaster. More and more his interest turned to his surroundings. He read omnivorously and startled Dr. Murlane, at times, with the keenness of insight shown by his endless questions.

Presently John Doe began to help Dr. Murlane around the sanitarium and gradually became an asset, rather than a liability. The months rolled on. One day John Doe came upon an article in the daily newspaper.

ASTRONOMER CATALOGS NOVA

Dr. Andrew Runn, dean of astronomy at Mainrath College, has reported the sudden appearance of a nova, or exploding star, in the region of Perselle. This nova is now fourth magnitude and a distance of about six light-years from Earth, which means that the mysterious cosmic catastrophe revealed by the appearance of the nova must actually have taken place six years ago. This is the second nova discovered by Dr. Runn, whose monograph on. . .

John Doe burst into Dr. Murlane's office with the paper in his hand.

"Doctor, read this! It is important to me—terribly important. I can sense that it is, but I can't remember how or why."

MURLANE smiled indulgently and read the article.

"I wouldn't upset myself about this if I were you, John. After all, this explosion occurred six years ago."

"Six years," Doe whispered, his face ashen, a faraway look in his eyes. "Six years ago. Then that isn't the one. Ours is still to come, but I have so little time left."

"Time?" Murlane repeated. "What do you mean? Time for what? Quick, what do you remember?"

John Doe suddenly slumped against the desk and placed his hands over his face.

"I can't remember. For a moment I had the oddest feeling that one of my memories was almost coming back. I knew somehow that because of a nova, something horrible was going to happen to Earth, unless I—I prevented it. But I can't remember what, and now I'm not even sure that I actually felt that."

"You'd better lie down awhile," Murlane said kindly. "You strain your nerves too much, fighting to get back those lost memories. They may come back some day when you least expect them, or they may never come back at all. Some little, inconsequential thing you see, or hear, or read sometimes forms a fleeting association with something in your past. You don't know what it is, so you build a phantom fear out of nothing."

"Won't you try to forget your whole problem completely and concentrate on the present and the future? You're clever, John, and you grasp things with remarkable facility. If you can dig in to build up a new personality in the world of today and tomorrow, you'll be a normal, happy citizen before you know it."

John Doe nodded. "I've got to, I guess. But I know now what I want to do. I want to go to college and study astronomy. Whenever I look up at the stars, or hear, or read anything about the heavens, I get the oddest feeling of familiarity and kinship. I think perhaps by following that path I can find either my lost memories, or at least complete satisfaction with the present and the future."

"A good idea, John. I know Andy Runn pretty well. He and I went to school together a few years back. I believe I can get you in at Mainrath under him, if you like. He'll help you find some work to do, and I'll let you have what money you'll need to get started on."

"But mind you, John, you can't step right into an observatory and start looking at the stars. You'll have to begin with mathematics and optics and all the other basic studies, then work your way up to research. You know that, don't you?"

"I know," John Doe breathed, his
(Continued on page 128)

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THE ETHER VIBRATES

(Continued from page 13)

body doesn't mean that Belarski has to drink out of the same xeno jug.

The old Sarge has seen queerer murals and paintings than last issue's cover decorating the walls of more than one space port. I even bought one once, and then found out they couldn't take it off the wall. So it's there yet—a purple night-blooming caw-caw dunking pink elephants in the Red Spot of Jupiter. Some day, if I ever go back to Neptune, I'm going to drink it off the wall of that spacemen's joint.

A BOUQUET FOR MILLARD

By Norman Hempling

Thanks, thanks for the memory, yes, of publishing my letter. It is my first and you should know how I felt when I first saw it in print. I felt surprised, happy, excited and all the rest. By the way, Sarge, here is some friendly advice. If you don't want to get your head blown off with my super KLE ray gun, you better quit calling me a space rat. I don't like it, see?

Well, I see you didn't take my advice and get rid of Belarski. You could have drowned him or whatever you liked except putting him back in SS. The rocket was drawn nicely, but the rest of the cover was the same old Belarski. Some of my friends did like the cover, but I for one didn't. The coloring was worse than last ish and that was plenty bad. The art (?) on a whole was—except for some of Wesso's work. I know what you're thinking, knocking again, but I take it for granted you want the truth, or maybe you don't. Well, here is my true opinion.

Manley Wade Wellman's "Devil's Planet" was excellent but Millard's "Gods Hate Kansas" (the full lengthier in last ish) was slightly better. I personally think Wellman is a better writer than Millard, but they all have their ups and downs. Your companion mag, CAPTAIN FUTURE, also contains an excellent book lengthier.

The yarn in the next issue sounds pretty good. But, say, Sarge, how about Wilcox, Binder, Hamilton and some others I mentioned in my previous letter to SS?

The Ether Vibrates isn't as good this ish as it was in the November copy of our mag. Who said that about me? Some big shot named Lesser said the letter department wasn't good because of my letter being in it. I hope it is because of the department being too small—2302 Ave. O, Brooklyn, N. Y.

Before I comment on your letter, Peelet Hempling, I want all of you space harpies to read the ethergram which immediately follows.

A BROADSIDE IN THE BREADBASKET

By Milton Lesser

Egad! Eureka! I hope I make myself plain. Oh, I don't? Well, that means that the January SS was absolutely stuffed with a crazy conglomeration of stuff for the most part. Reason? Well, here it is in official document form:

Whereas: The full-length novel, "The Devil's Planet," by Manly Wade Wellman was simply terrible. Without scientific fact. If MWW really wants to write detective trash so badly why doesn't he send a story into MORONIC MURDER MAG. Or is it that that particular bit of my imagination has already rejected the story and Manly dressed it up with a robot and the planet Mars and calls it stf. Never, never again!

Whereas: the cover wasn't worth a red cent. Whereas: The Gailur and Asimov shorts were terrible beyond words.

Now that the document of doom is over, Dear Space Sap, I can tell you the good points of this issue. First of all; Wesco did marvelous work. And please get that guy Orban out of CAPTAIN FUTURE. The Hall of Fame kind of saved the fiction end with "The Fitzgerald Contraction." It was good; in fact, to go a little farther; great. Enough said. Period.

The dept.'s were all bad. The letter section too short; the fanzine review used to be excellent, in fact, the best. But now, Dear Honorable Sergeant, you have become too Space Silly and have not offered any helpful info to amateur editors. One helpful thing would be to put the price of the mag, also. Some of us might want to buy them. Thrills in Science was, of course, terrible. Why have you, for so many months, or years, been stringing on to this nonsensical mess? The Question Box is fine. Interesting and perhaps educational.

In case you ever get stuck on an astronomical question, ask me. The equation of the parallax of the binary twin of Epsilon Auri-

[Turn page]

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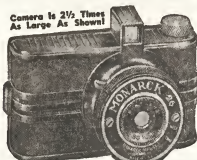
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rae is twice the apparent magnitude of forty minus thirty interstellar longitude degrees. I come to this conclusion by the following process. Captain Future traveled to the Birthplace. On the way, the Comet intercepted the minus velocity orbit of a Variable Cepheid. The broken end of plus minus sixty-two and nine-tenths degrees does not hold you. Take into consideration that a double complex supernova confronts the stellar spectrum.

And to prove I'm right, the man in the white uniform agreed one hundred per cent. He said something of my mother being scared by an eclipse. Also something about me falling on my head when I was small. But what has that got to with it?

I am hereby, and with sincere intentions, forming the SFTPOBOOISFMAFTPOCBBAF. (Society For The Protection Of Bems On Or In Science-Fiction Mags And For The Printing of Covers by Bok and Finlay.)

"Tarnished Utopia" looks good, although I may be wrong. What I would suggest is work by Binder (who is always a hit), Hamilton and if remotely possible, Fearn from "over there."

I have just received a message that the U-235 is running low. So-long, you fugitive from a Fomalhaut fish-fry. And, when the jets are in working order again, I'll re-plague you—2302 Avenue O. Brooklyn, N. Y.

While the old Sarge is rolling up his sleeves to pin your ears back, Kiwi Lesser, suppose you take a glance at the ethergram which immediately precedes your own garland of orchids to practically everybody and everything. Of all the impish apishness of a brawling spaceteer who's been sticking his snoot in my Xeno jug, you take the minus 273 degree.

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I have here a short blast from a bird with sunspots before his eyes. Take a blinker at it.

THE MERRY-GO-ROUND

By Gerry de la Ree, Jr.

I hate to keep complaining, but that guy Belarski just doesn't belong on a science fiction magazine cover. That thing he did on the November cover was worse than some of his previous efforts. Dog-gone-it, almost all the letters say they don't like friend Belarski, or Bergey or Brown either, for that matter.

But what happens? You just keep on rotating them every so often, and encourage those horrible bug-eyed-monsters to continue. Why do you chase away readers with such stuff on the front cover, when the stories inside are really very good?

Speaking of stories, I liked Millard's "The Gods Hate Kansas," and am looking forward to M. W. Wellman's yarn in the next issue. The interior illustrations for your yarns are pretty good. Wesso is all right on scenes, but all his characters look alike. That group he had on page 19 looked like one of those "match up the twins" ads in some magazines. Am still waiting to see a few pictures by Bok, and some more by Paul and Finlay. In the way of stories, scrape up some more Binder yarns, if possible. Williamson is good, too. The departments in STARTLING AND TWS are the best in any science fiction mag, and I hope that you continue them.

Note to Katharine Baum: THE NEW ADAM was terrible! It was positively the worst story that S. G. Wienbaum ever put his pen to, and should never have been published, as far as I am concerned.

Well, it's about time I quit rambling, but mark me up with those who say—GO MONTHLY—9 Bogert Place, Westwood, N. J.

Short, and not too sweet, Kiwi. And doesn't the old space dog think it's odd you like Wellman and Millard, and nobody else? Or am I not supposed to read between the lines or soak off the postage stamp to see the hidden message?

You go on putting your ink spots on Sunspots and leave the tarring and feathering to the Sarge. What's wrong with a carousel, anyway? Sure, you go around and around, but when you run out of rocket fuel—paint, in this instance—you don't have to walk far. How come you overlook the nice things said about Belarski, Bergey and Brown?

Just for your sass, you can climb up into the control-room and stand an extra trick at astrogation. And don't eclipse us or get any ink spots on your uniform, either. The commander-in-chief makes inspection tour this watch.

Try this next flash on your televisor screen. Believe it or not, the old Sarge simply peels them off as they come—good, bad or indifferent.

A ROCKET OF ANOTHER COLOR

By Ernest R. Elliot

Just finished reading the November issue of S.S., and sure enjoyed every yarn. I like

[Turn page]



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everything about our magazine from cover to cover.

"The Gods Hate Kansas" is one of the best stories I've ever read. Also, for tops is, "Last Laugh," "Trail's End," and "The Boneless Horror." I'd like to see two or three more stories in each number.

Keep up the variety of yarns and departments, and you'll sell one S.S. magazine every issue to this reader. I also read **THRILLING WONDER STORIES**—2438 N. Kennedy, Kokomo, Ind.

So there you are, thunder of one sort on the left, thunder of another sort on the right. Is it any wonder, or is it startling that the old Sarge gets a little rocket deaf in both ears?

You like the magazine, eh, Pee-lot Elliot? Didn't have one harsh thing to say to your astrologer, eh? No complaints, not even about your quarters or the food, eh? You teacher's pet! Why—er—how about coming up to my cabin on the next off-watch and having a snort of xeno?

Well, well, well! And what do I receive now? Engineer, warm up another battery of rockets to keep this craft accelerating with the Sarge. A nice long flash from one of our gal spaceteers. That always hits the old space dog in the vulnerable spot in his space suit. It proves that gals, as well as you garden variety of space swabs, go avoyaging with us on our science fiction flights.

Take it away, gall

ASTROLOGY GREET'S ASTRONOMY

By Bee Helena Clark Leeds

Before I take off on this observation tour, I want to let you know I've checked the fuel tank, and find it wanting. Please take special note of this. Did you ever break in a new fountain pen? I lost my expensive fountain pen twice this week, just when I wanted it to write you some compliments.

Now let me say, I've read many different science fiction magazines. When a September 1941 issue of **STARTLING STORIES** came my way, I found the stories very much to my liking, but I felt no inclination to write and tell you so until I read **THE ETHER VIBRATES** department. In fact, the idea of writing was so remote that it smacked me down with its suddenness.

As my letterhead announces, I teach Astrology. No matter what your personal and private ideas may be concerning this matter, I do not expect you to let your sentiments interfere with business. I want to say that if none of the authors (and artists) have any knowledge along this line, it is truly amazing how closely they often parallel it in depicting the intrinsic nature of the planets, their inhabitants, etc., even though their application is of a different type.

When I saw your literary title, it positively clinched things and brought matters to such a head that I just had to write to you.

Saturn, as you may know, is supposed to be a maffic. Well, I admit I've never had him court me in any Jovian mood, but though he is such an expert at obstructing one's path, still, on a more nature meditation, after cooling off, I have usually found him to be a stauncher friend than the genial Jove, or Jupiter. To Saturn often falls the unpleasant task of correcting errors, as a loving parent denies a child his wishes, for its own safety, while Jupiter sometimes steals the fox right off your feet, with one cunning, while patting you on the back with the other.

Well, enough of this subject. Now let's talk about our magazine.

I was highly intrigued by "The Bottom of the World" by the Burroughs. "Prisoners in

"Flatland" by Long was refreshing, too, but I didn't like the plot of "Death from the Stars," though I did think it was quite ably handled, considering its context. "No Heroes Wanted" certainly was adolescent though. Is the author just out of college, or something? At that, I believe it is better than I could do.

So few of my personal friends read this type of literature, and those few seems always to be married men, or old bachelors who can't or won't discuss it with me intelligently. I'd love to correspond with someone who enjoys the same things I do. Will some of the science fiction fans please write to me?

Thanks especially for the interesting, good-humored department of THE ETHER VIBRATES, and may all the gods bless you while all the devils be prohibited from cursing you.—1112 Turk Street, San Francisco, California.

Well, bless your heart, Bee Helena, for them kind words. You'll have the old astrologer punching every button of the rocket banks and driving us off at a double tangent if you don't lay off the flowers. Sure, the old space dog goes in for Astrology, too. Maybe you've seen our companion magazine—EVERYDAY ASTROLOGY—on the newsstands.

Shut up, you space monkeys! This is no plug for that book any more than a casual mention of CAPTAIN FUTURE, or THRILLING WONDER STORIES is for them. To get back to this gal—why don't some of you San Francisco fan club members invite Bee to a science-fiction bee? Isn't that a honey of a suggestion?

All right, so the pun is corny, but the idea is good. Speaking of fan club meetings, I have here a flash from Peoria. I see from the gauge that the fuel is running low. Think I'll try some of Captain Future's go-devil or maybe some of that new U-235

[Turn page]

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atomic stuff soon and see if I can get any more speed out of this craft.

But it won't make the Ether Vibrate any faster than a good shot of xeno. Sa-y-y-y, that's an idea. While I'm removing the head of the combustion chamber of the rear rocket bank, take a glance at this ethergram from Illinois.

ANOTHER FAN CLUB

By Edward C. Conner

Okay, you space-dogs in Central Illinois, clear the rocket-ports for action! (Oh, I almost forgot to tell you, Sarge, I am attempting to form a science-fiction fan-club in Peoria & Cent. Ill., and would appreciate your printing this. Y'see, the ether-hounds around here seem to be in suspended animation, and they need a shot of that potent potion known as Xeno Juice. Brrrrrr-r-r—the mere thought of that stuff makes me tremble!)

So, therefore, all you girls & boys, drop a line to me, and help organize a real club!—929 Butler Street, Peoria, Ill.

And happy meetings to you fans around Peoria, if you get together. Don't fail to write in for a chapter charter when you organize. Address SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE, 10 East 40th St., New York, N.Y.

Which brings me to the end of the chattering over this voyage. Don't pester me any more right now; I've got an experiment to try. Hand me that xeno jug, will you, one of you pee-lots? No, not that one on my desk—the full one in the rack. That's right—thanks. Now to charge the combustion chamber with xen— flash! BOOM! . . .

Well, that won't work. Too strong. So long, you grinning space rats. I'll pick you up next issue—if I can get a new rocket chamber installed by then.

—SERGEANT SATURN,
The Old Space Dog

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REVIEW OF THE SCIENCE FICTION FAN PUBLICATIONS

By
SERGEANT SATURN

YOU BLASTED space rats still hanging around? Able to sit up after that last blast the old space dog gave you, eh? Able to sit up and take a little soup, huh? Well, the old Sarge will feed you some nitroglycerin. And do you kiwis rate it! You kept the old Sarge up all night reading fan magazines in order to chart a comprehensible course across this tricky sea of printer's ink.

I thought I was a pretty well-rocketed spaceman until I started following the flights of imagination in fan mags. Jumping Jupiter, do you space birds get around! Fortunately for the old Sarge this was a light month for scientific publications, or he'd be reading yet.

Gird up your loins or tighten your suspenders or take up a couple of zips in your space suit—or whatever the proper parlance is in this dizzy day. Blast off!

FANTASY NEWS (weekly s-f newspaper) P. O. Box 84, Elmont, N. Y. William Sykora, editor.

Bad job of black-ink stenciling on yellow stock. Typical yellow sheet, eh? Never mind, the troglodytes of the Venusian swamps couldn't do half as well. Last time I was there they couldn't even read or write. wouldn't have done any good to write in the mud, anyway. Not as permanent as Martian sand. But—oh, yeah, the fan sheet. A darn good idea, and it really has news in it. Keep plugging away, kiwis.

FANTASY TIMES (monthly) 137-07 32nd Ave., Flushing, N. Y. James V. Taurasi, publisher. Sam Moskowitz, editor.

I reviewed a copy of this sheet last issue. Boy, what a difference. Only one sheet, but it's beginning to look like an uptown illustrated newspaper—cuts and everything. Nice going, pee-lots.

FANTASY FICTION FIELD (weekly) 1702 Dahill Road, Brooklyn, N. Y. Julius Unger, editor.

Two sheets, four pages, pretty clear stenciling job. Substantiates claim to "Illustrated" in title with a couple of photo prints clipped to copy. Fit 'em in the vacant spaces to suit yourself. I'd rather have a bunch of picture postcards from the hot spots of Neptune. No snapshot furnished for the blank quarter-page on page three. Draw your own: I'm having Belarski ink in one for me. Otherwise, short cargo but nicely arranged and stowed away.

[Turn page]

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PACIFICONEWS (No editorial or publishing insert).

Three sheets mimeographed in green. Nice cover line drawing plugging 1942 convention. Fourth sheet tacked on with recording dope on the Denver convention. Sort of a convention issue. For news of Christmas Past and Christmas Future you kiwis better get in on this one—if you can find it.

SPACEWAYS (twice every three months) 303 Bryan Place. Harry Warner, Jr., editor.

Salmon pink covers with weird line drawings—horse head on the front with anti-aircraft hat shooting at a drunken Japanese lantern—Puss-in-boots as Robin Hood on the back—courtesy of Catmen of Calistaro. Internal workings okay. Nice format and good arrangement, but solid pack with more of that single-spaced line stuff. There's more space in an atom than in SPACEWAYS. Twenty-four pages of this, too. Your money's worth in this cargo.

SUN SPOTS (bi-monthly) 31 Bogert Pl., Westwood, N. J. Roderick Gaetz, Bob Blanchard, Gerry de la Ree, Jr., editors.

Twelve pages of this ink spot this trip. Still small format, but ALL set in type. Still plugging articles by professionals. Not strictly amateurish, but not commercial, either. So we won't slap a space embargo on for this voyage. Good gangster or Western sheriff show-down scene on front cover against a backdrop of starry universe. The old Sarge would call it the last Hatfield-McCoy shoot-out on Jupiter. And what do you know—they have a fan mag review column, too. Guess the old space dog can take a nap.

ULTRA (bi-monthly) 274 Edgecliff Road, Sydney, N. S. W., Australia. Eric F. Russell, editor.

Pale blue covers, illustrated front and back, and eighteen pages of mimeographed matter, black on white. Fiction, articles, poetry, departments. And a cartoon. And a photo snapshot. Quite a creditable cargo. You American fans ought to like this fan mag. Even the old Sarge can't find anything to grumble about. Never mind, I'll slap a ray gun on this publication next time and make it Ne Plus.

VOICE OF THE IMAGINATION (six-weekly) Box 6475 Metropolitan Station, Los Angeles, Cal. Forrest J. Ackerman, editor.

Also ACKERMANIAN PRESENTS HOFFMANIA.

Poolsap size with green front cover and yellow back sheet. Sixteen pages of green-ink mimeographing on white. Cover drawing by Grace Talbot. Some doll. Reminds the old space dog of the moon maid of Saturn, I mean Saturn with the rings. This is the fourth anniversary number. Crammed full of everything, even to phonetic wording. More of this blasted space-jamming of single-spaced copy, but just about as newsworthy as any fan mag can't find anything to grumble about. Never mind, I'll slap a ray gun on this publication next time and make it Ne Plus.

As for the Hoffman supplement—well, the old Sarge bets that Hoffman guy sleeps with the lights on. Nobody ever dug up a collection of flora and fauna like that off of futuristic wall paper. The prize is number two—a bilious sea lion sitting on a triangular parlor chair.

The last one isn't any slouch itself—an electrified beef tongue with a double snout. But even the old space dog can't describe these

drawings. Xeno falls me. You'll have to view them for yourselves.

Which brings the old Sarge to the bottom of the pile for this voyage. You ink slingers don't give me enough target to shoot at; you do pretty good jobs for kiwis. Maybe I can work up a little sweat when The Ether Vibrates this issue. If I think up any smart crack, I'll save it for next review.

Meanwhile, safe rocketings and happy landings to you all.

Editor's note: If you fan mag publishers want Sargeant Saturn to wisecrack reviews of your magazines, send in your current copies. The old space dog will review only fan mags received between publication dates of STARTLING STORIES.

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STATEMENT OF THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, CIRCULATION, ETC., REQUIRED BY THE ACTS OF CONGRESS OF AUGUST 24, 1912, AND MARCH 3, 1933, of Startling Stories, published bi-monthly at Chicago, Ill., for October 1, 1941. State of New York, County of New York, ss. Before me, a Notary Public in and for the State and County aforesaid, personally appeared H. L. Herbert, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the Business Manager of Startling Stories, and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management, etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, as amended by the Act of March 3, 1933, embodied in section 537, Postal Laws and Regulations, printed on the reverse of this form, to wit: 1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business manager are: Publisher, Better Publications, Inc., 10 East 40th Street, New York, N. Y.; Editor, none; Managing Editor, none; Business Manager, H. L. Herbert, 10 East 40th Street, New York, N. Y. 2. That the owners are: Better Publications, Inc., 10 East 40th Street, New York, N. Y.; N. L. Pines, 10 East 40th Street, New York, N. Y. 3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are none. 4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company, but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner; and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest direct or indirect in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him. H. L. Herbert, Business Manager. Sworn to and subscribed before me this 10th day of October, 1941. Eugene Wechsler, Notary Public. My commission expires March 30, 1943.

MISTER JOHN DOE, EARTHMEN

(Continued from page 117)

eyes suddenly shining. "But that won't take long. I'll pay you back soon, and I'll get into the observatory before you know it."

A MONTH later, when school opened, John Doe was a student in the freshman classes at Mainrath. Urged by his friend Murlane, Dr. Runn kept an eye on John Doe and guided him with help and suggestions. He, too, was amazed at the way the man grasped his studies and literally skyrocketed through the classes.

One day John Doe entered Runn's office, his head high and a fire of determination in his eyes.

"Dr. Runn, I'd like to work with you," he stated. "I have my foundation studies well in hand, and I can't stand the terrible feeling of disaster that nags me constantly. I've got to get in here and really study the stars. It's in here I'll find myself, if I ever do."

Dr. Runn eyed the young man keenly.

"All right, Doe, I guess it can be arranged. Any idea of what you'd like to tackle?"

"Yes. Novae—new stars—exploding stars, as you call them. I have a theory I'd like to test. The other night, while I was reading one of your lectures, the queerest thought popped into my head. Suppose it isn't the star or sun that explodes at all, but a combustible cosmic cloud that drifts into that sun and ignites from the terrific heat!"

"It could be, I guess," Runn acknowledged thoughtfully. "What do you propose to do with the theory?"

"Prove it! I want to locate and study the drift of cosmic clouds, see if I can't postulate a sound theory from their movements."

"Help yourself," invited Runn. "Call on me for any suggestions or help you might need."

John Doe threw back his shoulders. For the first time since Runn had known him, a smile touched his lips. He turned and went out to the astrophysical laboratories.

Back there, in his spare time, he puttered with an odd little piece of

electrical apparatus. He wasn't sure just what it was, or why he put certain wires and coils and cells together the way he did. But he was beginning to realize that shreds of his lost memory were responsible. Here and there, vague and disconnected, pieces of the jigsaw puzzle of his past were beginning to fit themselves together.

SEVERAL billion miles away, in the depths of space, a dark cloud of cosmic dust and inflammable gases drifted ominously toward the Solar System. In ten months and eighteen days, that cloud would touch the orbit of Pluto. It would drift slowly inward, past hurtling Neptune, past Uranus, closer and closer to the blazing ball of the waiting Sun.

What happened when the cloud drew that near depended solely on one person—John Doe, alien Earthman, testing a vague theory with untrained hands and distracted mind, in a little college laboratory.

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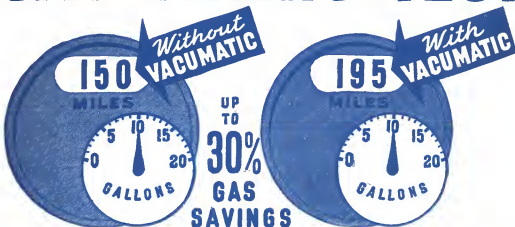
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No obligation to buy. See machine on wide open 10 day trial. Pay me no money until you test, inspect, compare, and use this Underwood Noiseless. Judge for yourself without hurry and without risk. When you are convinced that this is the biggest typewriter bargain you have ever seen then say, "I'll Buy." Send only 70c a week or \$3.00 a month until term price of only \$43.85 is paid. Try it first, enjoy a full 10 days' steady use. There is no red tape or investigation—My offer is exactly as I state it.

2-YEAR GUARANTEE

I back this machine with my personal 2-yr. guarantee that it is in A-1 condition in every respect—that it will give first class service. Over 30 years of fair dealing and my 200,000 satisfied customers prove the soundness of my golden rule policy and prove that dealing direct with me saves you money.



Touch Typing Course

A complete home study course of famous Van Sant Touch Typing system. Learn to type quickly and easily. Carefully illustrated. Written expressly for home use.

MAIL COUPON NOW—Limited Quantity on Sale!

International Typewriter Exchange, Dept. 398, 231 W. Monroe St., Chicago, Ill.
Send Underwood Noiseless (F.O.B. Chicago) for ten days' trial. If I keep it, I will pay \$3.00 per month until easy term price (\$43.85) is paid. If I am not satisfied I can return it express collect. ☐ 10" carriage. ☐ 14" carriage (\$3.00 extra)
☐ Check for typewriter stand (\$3.50 extra—payable 25c a month). Stand sent on receipt of first payment on Underwood.

Name Typewritten signatures not acceptable Age.....

Address

City State.....

CAUTION—For quick shipment give occupation and reference